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British Birds

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Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2015

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Front-cover photograph: Male Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla*, Port of Ness, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, October 2015. *Graham Jepson*

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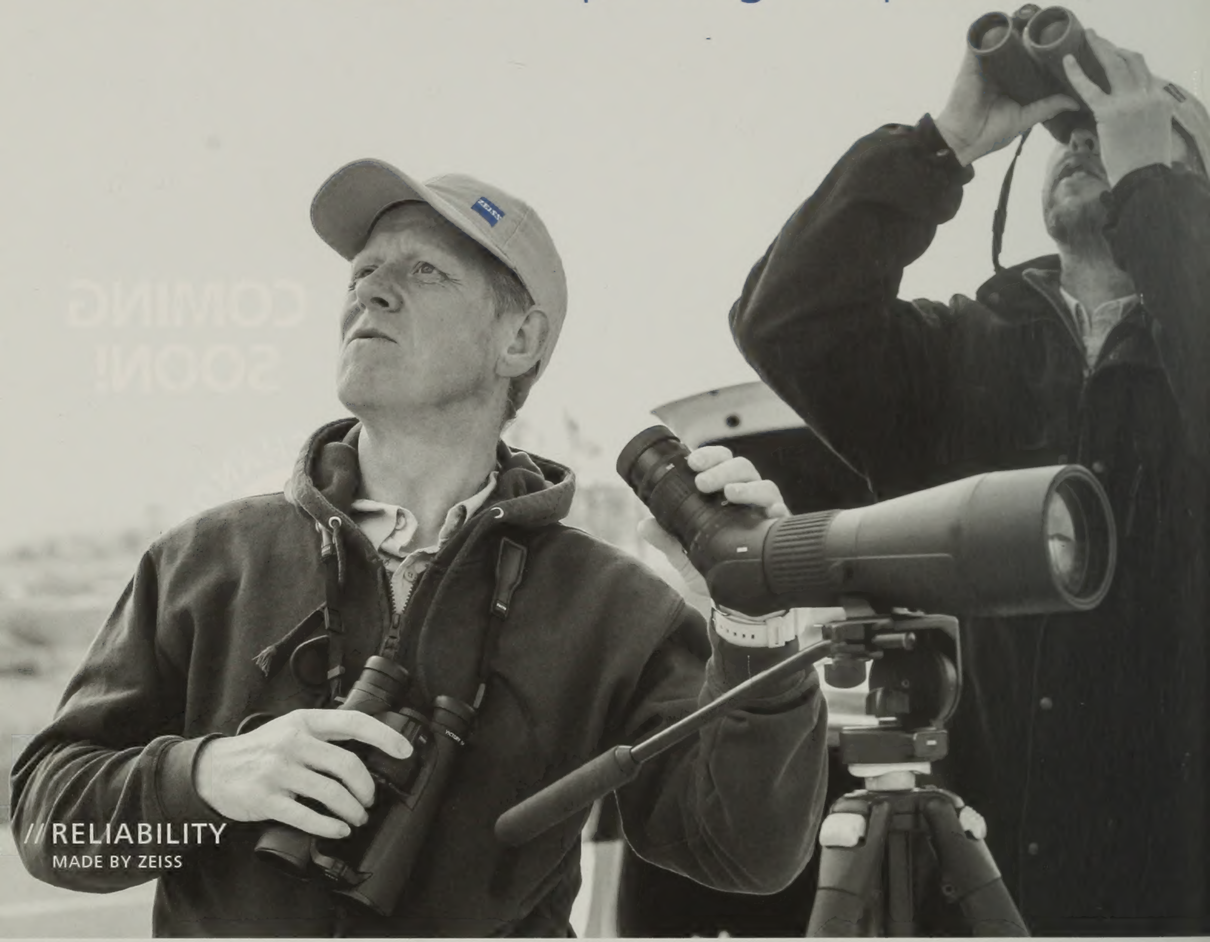

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British Birds

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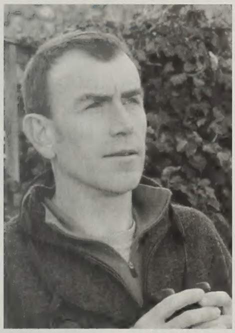

It might appear to the casual observer that the rarity scene is fairly straightforward nowadays, when nearly every rarity is photographed, video-recorded, sound-recorded and/or has its DNA examined. To some extent that's true, perhaps. I assume that most submissions don't take BBRC's voting members too long to assess. I've recently returned for a second stint on the Shetland rarities committee and have found that most records are not difficult – generally, there's an identifiable photograph to admire and you're soon on to the next one. It's the minority of tougher records, often those with just a written description, that take most of the time and the soul-searching. Some of those are tough because the ID is genuinely difficult, and it's good to see BBRC working through the backlog of some more difficult taxa in this year's report. Many birders (me included, admittedly) might struggle to be too enthused by vagrant Canada Geese and yet more large gulls, and mourn the passing of some of the more charismatic eastern passerines; but the rarities report is about rare birds, not appealing ones. And the Scarce Migrants report provides a safe home for Citrine Wagtail, Olive-backed Pipit and the rest.

I'm not sure that finding rarities has become more straightforward either. I'm lucky enough to find a few bits and pieces most years, because I live in a rarity hotspot. Perhaps I'm just getting long in the tooth, but my sense is that finding rare birds is more stressful than in pre-internet days. There's more pressure to get it sorted out quickly and spread the news (and the pictures); and you know it's available to the world for scrutiny within seconds of pressing 'send' on your mobile. If you don't put the news out, you're a suppressor; get it wrong and you feel a chump. For me, perhaps the most impressive thing about former BBRC voter Martin Garner was that he just didn't care if he was proved wrong later. He said what he thought, and if he turned out to be wrong, well, that was a lesson learnt and he took the positives from it. It helped that he wasn't often wrong – but sometimes he was, and he really didn't mind. I admired his style but I still struggle to follow his example!

Roger Riddington

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BB eye

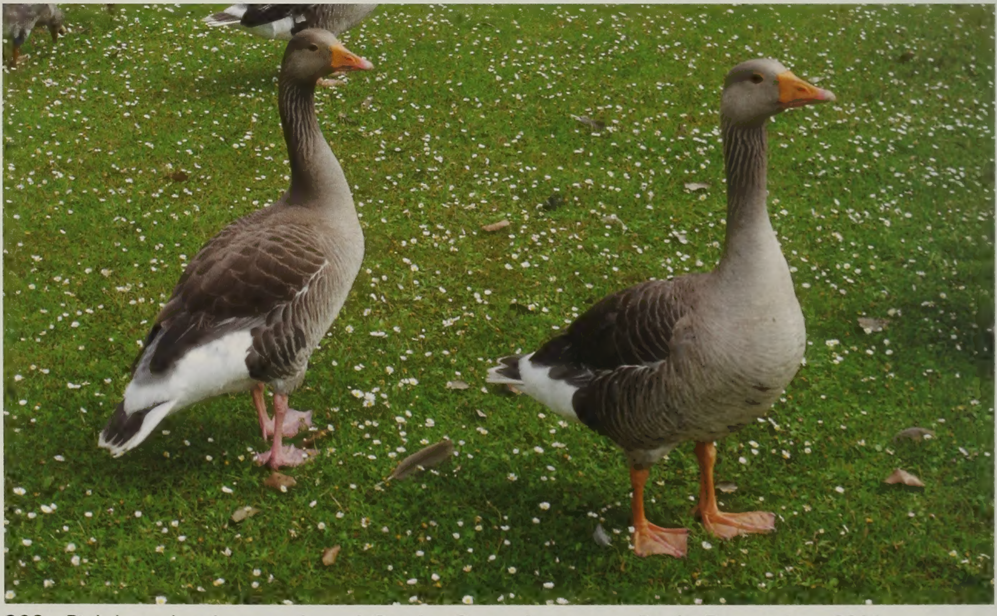
Goose legs and the internet

When J. N. Hollyer pointed out that Continental Song Thrushes *Turdus p. philomelos* had a flight call rather like that of the Redwing *T. iliacus* (*Brit. Birds* 65: 169–170), Richard Fitter, who had mentioned this (somewhat obliquely) in his Collins pocket guide, wrote that he should have taken advice given him long before by David Lack: 'new facts should always be recorded in papers, not books, which obviously nobody ever reads!' (*Brit. Birds* 65: 534–535). Similar questions are now raised by the huge amount of information available on websites, much of it on personal 'blogs', some of which has not made it into the popular (or authoritative) literature. Is it still best to publish observations in print, or does a reference on an 'informal' website suffice?

When I recently visited Mallorca for the first time in many years, I was surprised to see Audouin's Gulls *Larus audouinii* scavenging from picnic leftovers on the beaches and queuing up for waste food thrown from beach cafes. I could sit outside with a coffee and Audouin's would edge within a few metres in the hope of a handout. Such behaviour was not mentioned in books I had to hand but, seeing it described briefly and informally on the internet, I assumed 'everyone knew about it' and that I was just ill-informed and out of date and put aside thoughts of writing it up. Now, Matthew Harrison has written it up properly in a *BB* note (*Brit. Birds* 109: 352–353), with useful extra information.

I have also noted colourful variations in the spring face patterns of local Little Egrets *Egretta garzetta*, including various yellows and bright pink-mauve with or without blue central stripes. These are not mentioned in the usual books but there are brief references to such colours on internet sites, so again I thought it best not to appear to be 'claiming' something that others had been aware of for years. There is always the fear that readers will think 'surely he hasn't just noticed this and thinks he's discovered it?'

It does, however, still surprise me that, after noting variation in the leg colour of Greylag Geese *Anser anser* over 30–40 years, this has not reached the literature, although it is also sometimes noted on websites. I mentioned Greylags with orange legs a few times in print (e.g. Hayman & Hume 2001,



Rob Hume

298. Pink-legged and orange-legged Greylag Geese *Anser anser*, Poole, Dorset, June 2016.

The Birdlife of Britain & Europe, and Hume 2002 (and subsequent editions), *Birds of Britain and Europe*) but none of the popular field guides, nor *BWP* or *HBW*, nor Ogilvie 1978 (*Wild Geese*), for example, refer to any variation in leg colour at all. It is of no consequence for identification, and no doubt of little interest to most people, but it is odd that this variation has been 'missed' for so long. I noted orange-legged Greylags in the English Midlands and regularly see them in the Avon valley of Hampshire: if I look at 100 or so, I usually find 5–10 orange-legged birds, some matching the bright orange of a typical White-fronted Goose *A. albifrons*. I have not, though, recently been able to check 'wild' immigrant Greylags in winter, which may conceivably be different from introduced stock. In a tame, moulting flock in Poole, Dorset, in June 2016, I noticed variations from deep purple-pink, through typical pale pink, to pale orange with pink webs and toes, pale orange with pink on the joints and a few solidly orange (plate 298). Around 15% would have been noted as orange at a distance.

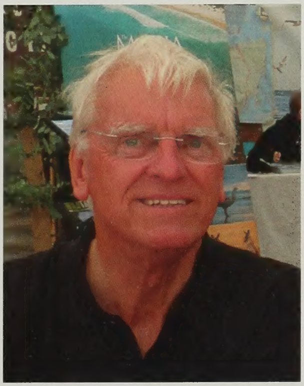
This is of small consequence but highlights the issue of how much information is 'out there' on the internet that has not been published in traditional ways. This refers to unpublished observations, opinions and discussions: the web has hugely improved the ability of all of us, however remote from a university library or the offices of one of the major conservation organisations, to do a moderately thorough 'literature search' of already published sources. Googling 'Greylag Goose leg colour' brings up 90,000 results ('Little Egret face colour' beats that with 313,000), so I am not about to trawl through all the possibilities; the assumption is that the first 15 or 20 references tend to be the more useful ones but who knows? This problem with the internet somewhat outweighs the benefits.

There is also the question of what is authoritative and reliable on the web and what might not be in all of this material that is now so widely available but not necessarily tested and peer-reviewed. Much information is on personal sites, other items on what equate roughly to notes in county bird reports, other observations appear in various forums, with more or less literate and polite contributions.

Much material is authoritative, well researched and 'quality stuff' – birdingfrontiers.com, initiated by the late Martin Garner, is an obvious example. Some is so exhaustive that it might, if published, clog up the pages of *BB* for years (for instance, the Gull Research Organisation provides an abundance of images and essential reference material for any gull-watcher on www.gull-research.org). Both of these, birdingfrontiers.com especially, were promoted largely by one person, and with the loss of Martin Garner, how long will his brainchild continue? How 'secure' is internet material of this kind?

Clearly, the internet offers a perfectly good alternative to published pages of print. It scores highly in its ability to present huge numbers of pictures, including 'record' shots that can be as helpful as perfect portraits. I doubt, though, whether I would have remembered, or could have located, Richard Fitter's comment above had it been on a 'blog', but I could recall the gist of it quite well from a short letter in *BB* printed 44 years ago. But there is a strong possibility that useful nuggets of information are 'missed' by most people, including authors of books. There might be many observers with material much more important than the leg colour of a goose, which deserves publication, who refrain from writing it up because they come across casual website references that other people will not have seen.

Rob Hume



Rob Hume has a wide range of ornithological interests; he spent much of his working life at the RSPB, where he was editor of the RSPB magazine *Birds* for 20 years, and has also served as chairman of the British Birds Rarities Committee and a member of *BB*'s Editorial Board.

News and comment

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

Opinions expressed in this feature are not necessarily those of *British Birds*

Parliament will debate a ban on driven grouse shooting

He's done it! Mark Avery's petition to Parliament for a debate on driven grouse shooting has achieved its aim: the Petitions Committee of the House of Commons has formally acknowledged that MPs WILL debate the issue.

The e-petition https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/125003 rocketed past the 100,000-signature threshold in August and, as the 20th September deadline neared, more than 120,000 people had signed up to support a ban on driven grouse shooting. E-petitions have only a six-month lifespan and to amass so much support in such a short space of time is a great success for Mark and 'Team Hen Harrier'.

This was the Petitions Committee's initial response: 'The Petitions Committee has agreed to schedule a debate on this petition. Before setting a date for the debate, the Committee would like the House of Commons to have the chance to hear evidence on this issue. This will help to inform MPs taking part in the House of Commons debate. More details about this will be announced in due course. We will keep you informed about what is happening and how you can get involved.'

(The Petitions Committee is a cross-party group of MPs. You can find out more about its work on its website: www.parliament.uk/petitions-committee/role .)

The interesting line in this brief notice is '… the Committee would like the House of Commons to have the chance to hear evidence on this issue...' A great opportunity for Mark to present the long list of reasons why driven grouse shooting should be banned.

Of course, Mark launched his first e-petition to ban driven grouse shooting in 2015 but it attracted 'only' 33,655 signatures in its six-month lifespan. Why has the 2016 version been signed by nearly four times that number of people? Most likely it's been the spate of high-profile raptor persecution incidents on grouse moors this year; the determined campaigning by Mark and BBC TV presenter Chris Packham; and the pathetically small number of successful Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* nests in England in 2016.

Young Hen Harriers – you win one, you lose one

It is indeed a sad state of affairs when the fledging of a single Hen Harrier chick on an English moorland is a major news story. But the RSPB rightly celebrated the event at its Geltsdale reserve in Cumbria this summer – the first successful nest on the reserve for a decade.

The male bird, named Bonny, was the only chick to hatch from a clutch of five eggs on the North Pennines reserve and is one of only seven to fledge in the whole of England this season. The other chicks fledged from two nests in Northumberland (*Brit. Birds* 109: 489) on land managed by the Forestry Commission.

Hen Harriers teeter on the verge of extinction in England and Bonny's survival has been a classic tale of triumph over adversity, defying the odds at every turn. Blanaid Denman, the RSPB's Hen Harrier LIFE+ Project Manager, tells the story: 'Bonny's mother arrived at the reserve back in May looking for a mate but she had to wait several weeks for a male to turn up. When one finally did appear, she was not impressed: he was young and yet to gain his grey adult plumage. In a healthy population of Hen Harriers, an immature male like this wouldn't get a look-in. But with so few birds in England, the female had little option but to accept his advances or leave breeding to another year.'

Once it had been confirmed there was a nest, RSPB staff and volunteers mounted a round-the-clock watch and provided supplementary food under licence, to ensure that the family of Hen Harriers had the best possible chance of survival and success. Blanaid continues: 'The supplementary food proved vital as the inexperienced male was hopelessly inattentive of his dependent female, often vanishing for days before reappearing with a paltry food offering. The extra food ensured that the female never had to go far from the nest to feed Bonny or herself.'

Bonny has already achieved national fame as his name was selected by Chris Packham from over 2,300 entries to a competition run by Lush cosmetics, to celebrate the £122,000 raised from their 'Skydancer' bath bombs. He's one of a number of Hen Harriers satellite-tagged as part of the RSPB's

Hen Harrier LIFE Project across England, Scotland and the Isle of Man. You can follow them online at www.rspb.org.uk/henharrierlife

Sadly, another young male Hen Harrier satellite-tagged this year has already disappeared off the radar in the 'Bermuda triangle' of the Monadhliath Mountains southeast of Inverness where eight satellite-tagged Golden Eagles *Aquila chrysaetos* have gone missing in the past five years, three of them in 2016 (*Brit. Birds* 109: 490). The young harrier, named Elwood, was the only chick to fledge from a nest in Banffshire. The satellite-tag data indicated that the young bird fledged from its nest in the first week of July, but stayed close to the site in the hills above the River Spey until 20th July, when he began to travel more widely. By 27th, he had moved 30 km to the southwest, and had settled in the hills around Tomatin. The bird remained in this area, with the transmitter providing detailed information about his daily travels until transmissions ceased abruptly on 3rd August. The bird's last recorded position was on an area of managed moorland a few kilometres from the Slochd summit on the A9.

Ian Thomson, RSPB Scotland's Head of Investigations, said: 'This latest disappearance of a satellite-tagged bird is deeply concerning, and joins the long list of protected birds of prey that have been confirmed to have been illegally killed or disappeared suddenly in this area.

'The transmitters being fitted to these birds are exceedingly reliable, and illegal persecution is therefore the most likely explanation of the disappearance of these birds of prey. The absence of typical breeding raptor species from areas of suitable habitat, or at traditional nesting sites, in large parts of the Monadhliaths is further supporting evidence of a major problem with wildlife crime in this general area.

'The denials and obfuscation from representatives of the land management sector, and their consistent failure to acknowledge and address this problem, is one of the main reasons why our bird of prey populations are struggling in the central and eastern Highlands. We repeat our call to the Scottish Government to introduce a robust system of licensing of gamebird hunting, where the right to shoot is dependent on legal and sustainable management of the land, in line with approaches adopted in most other European countries.'

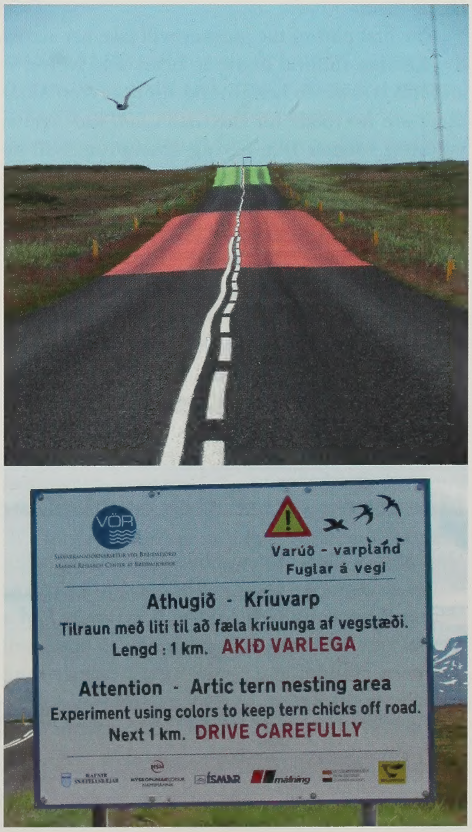
Teaching Arctic Terns the Pink Cross Code

A novel road safety initiative for nesting Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea* in Iceland was observed by *BB* reader John Lawton on a recent visit. He told N&c:

'One of the largest Arctic Tern colonies in Iceland is on the Snæfellsnes peninsula in the northwest of the island. The colony runs for about 3 km between the villages of Rif and Hellissandur, with birds nesting both in the villages themselves and on the open moorland either side of the main road that runs between them (Route 574).

'The terns like to sit on the road, which is fine for the adults – they simply fly away as a car approaches. But many chicks get killed. So, in an attempt to reduce (if not eliminate) chick deaths, villagers are experimenting with painting the road in green, pink and yellow, to see if it reduces its attractiveness to chicks (and possibly their parents).

'The experiment isn't replicated (there is only one block of each colour), and it's apparently too early to tell which – if any – colour is having the desired deterrent effect. But all credit to the villagers for trying!'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Varúð - varpland
Fuglar á vegi
Athugið - Kríuvarp
Tilraun með liti til að fæla kríuunga af vegstæði.
Lengd : 1 km. AKIÐ VARLEGA
Attention - Artic tern nesting area
Experiment using colors to keep tern chicks off road.
Next 1 km. DRIVE CAREFULLY
ÍSMAR
málning

299. The Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* road safety experiment in Iceland, September 2016.

John Lawton

Elegant Terns *do* occur in Europe

Genetic analysis has confirmed the identification of three separate Elegant Terns *Sterna elegans* in Europe, which could pave the way for evaluation of three British records. In their paper (in the *Journal of Ornithology* http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10336-016-1380-0), the seven co-authors, including our own Martin Collinson, discuss DNA work on samples from three individual 'Elegant-type' terns in France and Spain analysed using multi-locus barcoding, which revealed that each individual matched the DNA of pure Elegant Tern.

Their findings, which show that three pure Elegant Terns have been seen in Europe in every year during 2002–15, suggest that any orange-billed tern resembling Elegant Tern in western Europe is most likely to be just that, rather than a hybrid. Good candidates for Elegant Tern were observed and photographed in Devon and Caernarfonshire in spring/summer 2002 and in Dorset on 10th May 2005. But none of these birds has yet been accepted onto the British List while the debate about potential hybrids with other orange/yellow-billed terns continues. The species has been on the Irish List since 1982 with four subsequent records (including in 2002 and 2005).

Sacha migrates from Siberia with the swans

WWT Slimbridge scientist Sacha Dench should be airborne by the time you read this: she's planning to fly a paramotor alongside migrating Bewick's Swans *Cygnus columbianus* as they make the 7,000-km journey from Siberia to the UK.

Flying by paramotor means that Sacha will be paragliding with a propeller strapped to her back, to get as close as possible to flying as the swans do. Each night she will land close by to observe the birds' behaviour on migration – and the hazards facing them.

The first part of the journey will take her across the Russian tundra, home to bears and wolves – and inaccessible to her ground support crew since there are no roads for the first 1,000 km. Sacha, who is a former free-diving champion, will be relying on good weather forecasting – and nomadic reindeer herders if she has a problem. At night, she plans to sleep in huts built by hunters for shelter.

Her journey following the swans will take her to over 11 countries, on the journey the swans make each year from the Arctic tundra to wetlands in the UK – and back again.

So how will it work? Sacha explains: 'We've had to plan the route carefully as you can't just fly wherever you like right across Russia and Europe. This means that at times I'll be with the birds, and at other times I won't, but I'll be visiting all the countries that they do. Swans can fly for hours at a time, whereas the paramotor needs to stop to refuel every three hours, and the whole point about the expedition is that it's the stops that are just as important as the flight itself.'

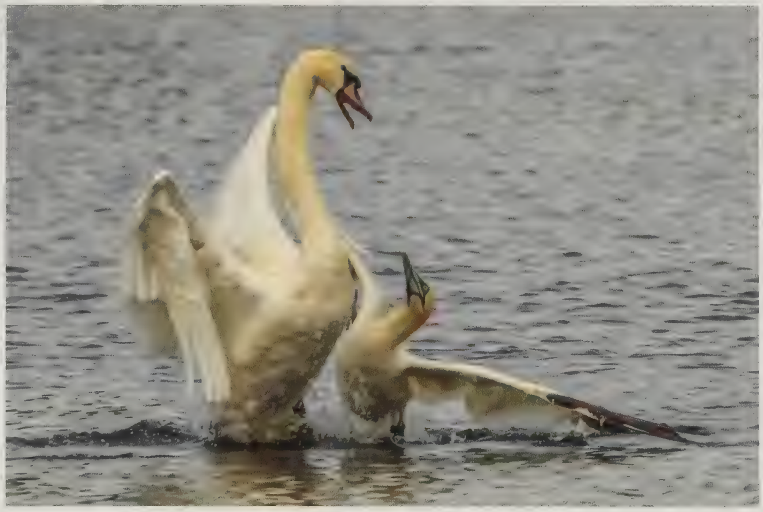
The main motive behind Flight of the Swans www.flightoftheswans.org is to raise awareness of the steady decline of Bewick's Swans, whose numbers have halved in the last 20 years. Sacha says: 'We want to create a sort of Mexican wave of support rippling along the flyway as the birds pass through. We want to show everyone how awesome these birds are, so throughout the journey, we'll be engaging with as many people as we can. We'll be meeting nomads on the tundra, hunting groups and farmers, we'll be talking to land developers, politicians and windfarm and other power companies. Basically, we're looking to engage with anyone whose lives may affect the swans on their journey to stimulate their interest in them.'

You can follow Sacha's progress via the website and on Twitter: @WWTSwanFlight

Milestone patch tick at Midlands wetland is… Gannet!

N&c always likes to hear about significant milestones at cherished local patches and Marsh Lane Nature Reserve in West Midlands certainly had a special one in August. The reserve, at Berkswell (between Solihull and Coventry), a former sand and gravel extraction site on land owned by the Packington Estate, is in the floodplain of the River Blythe. It opened to permit holders on 1st July 2001 and since then has amassed a creditable species list for a patch slap bang in the middle of the country – including Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*, Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*, Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*, Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* and Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*.

But the patch list has sat stubbornly at 199 since 2014, when a Common Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* and that Bonaparte's Gull became the 198th and 199th birds recorded at the site.



Jeff Rankin

300. Mute Swan *Cygnus olor* and Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*, Marsh Lane Nature Reserve, West Midlands, August 2016.

Packington Estate manager Nick Barlow takes up the story: 'Since 2014 we have been waiting impatiently for the 200th species. Possibles, such as Pied Flycatcher [*Ficedula hypoleuca*] and Purple Heron [*Ardea purpurea*], had come and gone, having not been clinched. Bets on the likely species included Common Scoter [*Melanitta nigra*], Red-necked Phalarope [*Phalaropus lobatus*] and White-winged Black Tern [*Chlidonias leucopterus*] but most definitely NOT Northern Gannet [*Morus bassanus*]!

'We have had some unexpected birds at Marsh Lane but the sight of a Northern Gannet cruising round the pools on 21st August, flushing a Black-tailed Godwit [*Limosa limosa*] and standing up to a Mute Swan [*Cygnus olor*] will remain with those lucky enough to see it for a long time.'

www.packingtonestate.co.uk/about/marsh-lane-nature-reserve

State of Nature 2016 report published

It's not too late to save UK nature but we must act now – that's the conclusion from a coalition of more than 50 leading wildlife and research organisations behind the *State of Nature* 2016 report. Following on from the groundbreaking *State of Nature* report in 2013, leading professionals from 53 wildlife organisations have pooled expertise and knowledge to present the clearest picture to date of the status of our native species across land and sea. The report reveals that over half (56%) of UK species studied have declined since 1970, while more than a thousand (1,199 to be precise) of the nearly 8,000 species assessed in the UK are under threat of disappearing from our shores altogether.

The *State of Nature* 2016 UK report was launched by Sir David Attenborough at the Royal Society in London on 14th September. Sir David said: 'The natural world is in serious trouble and it needs our help as never before.

'The rallying call issued after the *State of Nature* report in 2013 has promoted exciting and innovative conservation projects. Landscapes are being restored, special places defended, struggling species being saved and brought back. But we need to build significantly on this progress if we are to provide a bright future for nature and for people.'

In order to reduce the impact we are having on our wildlife, and to help struggling species, we needed to understand the root cause of population declines. Using evidence from the last 50 years, experts have established that significant and ongoing changes in agricultural practices are having the single biggest impact on nature.

Mark Eaton, lead author on the report, said: 'Never before have we known this much about the state of UK nature and the threats it is facing. Since the 2013 report, the partnership and many landowners have used this knowledge to underpin some amazing scientific and conservation work. But more is needed to put nature back where it belongs – we must continue to work to help restore our land and sea for wildlife.

You can download the *State of Nature* 2016 report at: www.rspb.org.uk/son

For extended versions of many of the stories featured here, and much more, visit our website www.britishbirds.co.uk

Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2015

Nigel Hudson and the Rarities Committee

Chairman's introduction

I'd like to start this year by saying that, sadly, this is Nigel Hudson's final report as BBRC Secretary. After nine years, Nigel has decided to retire from Rarities Committee duty and enjoy life in Scilly. It is hard to overestimate the impact that Nigel has had on the way the Committee works, completing the transition from postal circulations (last used when Mike Rogers was Secretary), via the e-mail circulation system that Peter Fraser introduced, to the current system, where the voting is carried out solely online. Managing that transition alone would have been impressive enough, but Nigel has introduced an automated system for producing the report, which not only improves the accuracy of what it contains, but has also reduced the workload for those involved in producing and editing the finished article. The efficiency of the systems that Nigel introduced allowed the report to be published earlier than had been the case for several years prior to his appointment. Our target had been to restore the annual BBRC report to the November issue of *BB*, but Nigel's determination exceeded this schedule every year, with the report appearing in October in every year of his term as Secretary.

Nigel ensured that the Committee regularly reviewed its working practices, checking and testing the constitution and using the AGM as an opportunity for robust debate on our operating procedures. He took a keen interest in the rarity threshold and which species should be retained or removed from the list of those considered. He played a pivotal role in defining the Committee's current interpretation of what parameters define the frequency of occurrence of a BBRC species. As well as this inward attention to detail, he was also determined to improve BBRC's external communications and was instrumental in developing the 'Work in Progress' updates and the BBRC Twitter feed that enabled news of the Committee's decisions to be shared more effectively. He also took a keen interest in the presentation and content of the Annual Report, taking a leading role in coordinating the compilation of species comments and, more recently, introducing the short description summarising the current pattern of occurrence for each taxon. This last innovation reflected Nigel's desire to seek constant improvements, a defining character of his tenure as BBRC Secretary. For all of this, and his unfailing good humour for almost a whole decade, we are extremely grateful.

This is the 58th annual report of the British Birds Rarities Committee. The year 2015 saw a marked decrease in the number of rarities recorded; this report contains 392 accepted records, compared with 478 in 2014 and well over 500 in 2012 and 2013 (not including late submissions) – but involved 120 taxa (up from 118 in 2014). In part, this reduction is due to the removal of four regularly occurring species from the BBRC list: Lesser Scaup *Aythya affinis*, Penduline Tit *Remiz pendulinus*, Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* and Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*.

Following their assessment by BOURC, we are pleased to include no fewer than five taxa new to Britain (four species and one distinctive race) – see below. Of these, four were long-awaited, but one – Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* – has taken many by surprise. The inclusion of these four species takes the British List to 603 (the fifth new taxon, the Atlantic race of the Yellow-legged

Gull *Larus michahellis*, 'Azorean Yellow-legged Gull' *L. m. atlantis*, does not add to the overall total). Full accounts of each of these additions to the British List will appear in *BB* in due course.

Species with ten or fewer records in this report include:

- **1st** Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan*, Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* and Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*
- **1st & 2nd** 'Azorean Yellow-legged Gull' *Larus michahellis atlantis*
- **1st–10th** Cackling Goose *Branta hutchinsii*
- **2nd** Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*, Citril Finch *Carduelis citrinella* and Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla*
- **3rd** Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica*
- **4th–6th** Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum*
- **5th** Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* and Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*
- **5th–8th** Moltoni's Warbler *Sylvia subalpina*
- **6th** Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae*, Thick-billed Warbler *Iduna aedon* and Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia*
- **7th & 8th** Canada Goose *Branta canadensis interior/parvipes*
- **8th** Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius*
- **9th & 10th** Hudsonian Whimbrel *Numenius hudsonicus*
- **10th** Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* and Siberian Thrush *Geokichla sibirica*

Following the acceptance of the first Cackling Goose, a bird in Lancashire in 1976, the floodgates have well and truly opened and, in addition to the ten published here, an additional 70 or so claims are currently in the system. In a similar vein, several Yelkouan Shearwaters are also under review. There are no further Slaty-backed Gulls or Chinese Pond Herons lurking in the files, but we fully expect Slaty-backed and Azorean Yellow-legged Gulls to feature prominently on the radar of keen rarity hunters and to be identified more frequently in future. In addition, the identification of three further species has been accepted by BBRC and passed to BOURC for assessments as possible firsts: an Acadian Flycatcher *Empidonax virescens* in Kent, a Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* of the Iberian and northwest African form *M. f. iberiae* in Yorkshire and a Chestnut Bunting *Emberiza rutila* in Orkney, all in 2015 and all of which join an American White Ibis *Eudocimus albus* in exercising the BOURC's judgement.

There were no major influxes of BBRC rarities this year, but significantly above-average numbers of some species were reported, notably Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides*, Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*, Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli*, Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus* and, unsurprisingly, Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus*. Indeed, Red-flanked Bluetail has featured in an annual debate for a few years now as to when it will finally come off the rarity list, and it could be that 2016 will be its swan song. Conversely, there were below-average tallies of Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors*, Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla*, Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*, Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* and Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*, and also Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola* and Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* (the last two species returned to the BBRC list in 2015, along with Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* and Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*).

Other notable species seen this year included the two accessible and popular Harlequin Ducks *Histrionicus histrionicus* in Scotland, a Black Scoter *Melanitta americana* in Northumberland, a Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris* on a freshwater pool at Minsmere, a mobile Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni* along the east coast, an Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* followed by a Mourning Dove in a wintry pigeon double-act on Shetland, two Short-toed Treecreepers *Certhia brachydactyla* along the south coast, a Veery *Catharus fuscescens* on Orkney, Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus* on Shetland, Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* on Fair Isle and three Blyth's Pipits *Anthus godlewskii*.

It is worth emphasising that for species formerly occurring too regularly to feature on the BBRC list, or which may have fluctuated back and forth, we will use the statistics available from the 'Report on scarce migrant birds in Britain' in order to monitor their current status. The production of the Scarce Migrants report, using data primarily from birders submitted through the county recorder network, continues to be a vital tool for BBRC in maintaining a watching brief on the taxa at the edge of our remit. For species that have previously been national rarities, these data are very accurate. For the four newly 'promoted' species this year, this means using the Scarce Migrants report data from 1983–2014 for Aquatic Warbler and Tawny Pipit, and data from 2006–14 for Red-throated Pipit and Rustic Bunting. Still on statistics, this is the third year for which we have produced a rolling, 30-year trend statement for each species (found at the end of the species header), in an effort to provide an 'at a glance' summary for readers. The status of every species in this report remains under annual review, and has been revised for some species this year: Harlequin Duck, 'Balearic Woodchat Shrike' *Lanius senator badius*, Crag Martin and Veery have all moved from Very rare to Rare (see point 5 on p. 570 for further details).

In this year's report, we have adopted a different system of denoting the age of the birds listed. After much discussion, voting members agreed that we should move to a calendar-year ageing system, and this appears for the first time here, where every bird reported is allocated to an age category. We hope that this will be a straightforward and understandable system, which can be applied easily to almost all species in a British context (the possible exceptions being some tropical seabirds, which could potentially breed all year round, and Two-barred Crossbills *Loxia leucoptera*, which could conceivably fledge young before the turn of the year). The vast majority of our vagrants breed within set seasons of the calendar year and, since our annual reports are organised by calendar year, it seems intuitive to apply a calendar-year ageing system. The basic principles of this are quite simple: 1CY signifies first calendar year, i.e. a bird hatched in the current year (mostly 2015 in this report), whereas 2CY signifies a bird hatched in the previous year and thus in its second calendar year, and so on. Adding a '+' effectively denotes 'at least', so that a bird aged as a 2CY+ in 2015 means that it hatched in 2014 or earlier – and is therefore in its second calendar year *at least*. The use of 1CY+ is thus equivalent to 'age unknown', since the bird could have hatched in the current year or any year prior to this. Note that where an individual bird is recorded over two calendar years, the age for that individual is given as that when first discovered. So, for example, the Yorkshire Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax* in this report is given as '… Fraisthorpe, 1CY+, 31st December 2014 to 1st January…' (p. 584). In this case, the bird's age when first discovered (on 31st December 2014) was 1CY+, and this is the age used in the report entry; on 1st January 2015, its age automatically became 2CY+. In most cases, a bird's age is given only once, but for some of the older, returning wildfowl, further explanation is given in parentheses. We may still use the terms juvenile and adult in some cases, but to describe a plumage type rather than an age; age will be given first, using the CY terminology, with other terms used as appropriate to describe a bird's appearance. It should also prove possible to attribute more precise ages to returning individuals, particularly wildfowl. A bird treated as 'presumed same' will now have its age increased incrementally year by year, where possible. We hope that this will give readers an immediate sense of the age of some of our long-staying rarities.

We have received several requests to clarify our use of the term 'photo' after a record. It is clear that some photos are better than others, and some are of little use in identifying the species concerned. A two-tier system was considered, whereby identifiable photos would be labelled as 'photo 1', and photos that failed to conclusively identify the species but didn't detract from it either would be graded 'photo 2'. However, the Committee felt that to have a two-tier system would in itself become subjective. An identifiable photo to one person is an unidentifiable blob to another and, for the time being at least, it was decided to retain the current system, simply labelling every record supported by some form of photographic evidence. Readers should be aware, however, that this label does not necessarily mean the bird was identifiable in the images supplied.

Readers will also see the publication of a presumed hybrid under its own heading for the first time in this report, with the acceptance of a hybrid Pallid × Hen Harrier *C. cyaneus* at Spurn. Following a discussion at the AGM, it was decided that we would publish records of presumed hybrids involving just one BBRC species in this way, since not to do so would be to hamper our understanding of what are undoubtedly interesting ornithological events. Details on our approach to hybrids will be the subject of a forthcoming BBRC article (Stoddart in prep.) and observers are encouraged to submit records of birds that fit this category.

Two forthcoming projects may also be of interest. Those with long memories may recall the series of uniformly dark skuas seen in Dorset, Gower and Scilly, which were accepted by BBRC and BOURC as belonging simply to the 'Southern' group of *Stercorarius* skuas. Following further advances in the identification of these and a review of the DNA evidence (Votier *et al.* 2007), the files are again under review by BBRC for consideration as South Polar Skuas *S. maccormicki.* In a related vein, a recent paper on the genetics of Elegant Terns *Sterna elegans* and their hybrids in Europe (Dufour *et al.* 2016) has shed more light on the status of this Pacific species in Britain, and we look forward to being able to assess all of the currently held records in due course.

The paper-based BBRC archive is in the process of being scanned and stored digitally; once this task is complete it will be possible for both the Committee and other bona fide researchers to use it much more efficiently as a resource. Speaking of research, we are also delighted that the RSPB continues to sponsor the Committee's work. It is sobering to reflect on the four species that have recently been reinstated as rarities and their declines across Europe. The Aquatic Warbler in particular is a species where records from birders can highlight potential problems and declines within the breeding range, and may even inform conservation management decisions.

The BBRC Twitter account (@_BBRC) continues to be popular and you can follow the latest decisions as they happen as well as keeping up to date with BBRC news on our website (www.bbrc.org.uk). The website has been experiencing several issues this year, especially concerning the online submission form, and we can only apologise for any inconvenience this has caused. Until this is addressed fully, we recommend that observers continue to send in submissions using our standard form via e-mail to secretary@bbrc.co.uk.

Acknowledgments

BBRC continues to be supported financially by Carl Zeiss Ltd and RSPB. This support is invaluable in enabling BBRC to function and we remain extremely grateful to both sponsors. We wish to thank all the observers and photographers who sent details of their rare-bird observations to BBRC, either directly or via County Recorders. We would also like to thank BirdGuides for their continued support of the Committee by allowing BBRC members unrestricted access, and to both BirdGuides and Rare Bird Alert for their help in chasing up occasional unsubmitted records. The Committee can exist only with the support of the birding community, and our mandate is your continued support. Once again we wish to express our heartfelt thanks to county and regional recorders and their records committees for the invaluable work that they undertake in supporting BBRC. Special thanks to Steve White for his assistance throughout the year with scarce migrant statistics and to Mark Adams and all the staff at the NHM, Tring, for their continued support for our work, providing a room for our AGM in April and allowing unlimited access to the specimens in the collection. Thanks also go to all those individuals who updated information on earlier sightings following the posting of work-in-progress files on the BBRC website throughout the year. While they may not be acknowledged in the report, their contribution remains very significant for improving the accuracy of the information provided. We also thank the following in particular for their support in various ways during the year: the Sound Approach team, Janne Aalto, Steve Dudley, Peter Kennerley, Chris McInerny, Stephen Menzie, Killian Mullarney, Keith Naylor, Richard Porter, Adam Rowlands, Harry Scott and William Velmala. Reg Thorpe continued as Summariser, Brian Small as Museum Consultant and James Lidster continued to broadcast our news via Twitter. We also thank the *Dutch Birding* team for providing electronic copies of papers from that journal for reference and Ian Lewington for our logo.

Paul French

Systematic list of accepted records

The principles and procedures followed in considering records were explained in the 1958 report (*Brit. Birds* 53: 155–158). The following points show the basis on which the list has been compiled:

1. The details included for each record are (1) county; (2) locality; (3) number of birds if more than one, and age and sex if known; (4) dates; (5) if photographed, sound-recorded and/or DNA analysis carried out (and this evidence assessed by the Committee); (6) if trapped or found dead and where specimen is stored, if known; and (7) observer(s), in alphabetical order.
2. In general, this report is confined to records which are regarded as certain, and 'probables' are not included. In cases of the very similar Eastern Bonelli's *Phylloscopus orientalis* and Western Bonelli's Warblers *P. bonelli*, however, we publish indeterminate records, and this also applies to Canada/Cackling Geese *Branta canadensis/hutchinsii*, frigatebirds *Fregata*, Zino's/Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira/feae*, White-bellied/Black-bellied Storm-petrels *Fregetta grallaria/tropica*, Western/Semi-palmated Sandpipers *Calidris mauri/pusilla* in non-breeding plumage, Booted/Sykes's Warblers *Iduna caligata/rama* and the *Empidonax* flycatchers (see also *Brit. Birds* 94: 395).
3. The sequence of species, English names and scientific nomenclature follow the '*British Birds' List of Birds of the Western Palearctic*; see www.britishbirds.co.uk/birding-resources/the-british-birds-list
4. The three numbers in parentheses after each species name refer specifically to the total number of individuals recorded in Britain (i) to the end of 1949 (these statistics are kindly supplied by Keith Naylor – note that they may vary slightly between reports, as his continuing research brings more accuracy to the numbers), (ii) for the period since 1950, but excluding (iii) those listed here for the current year. The decision as to how many individuals were involved is often difficult, but a consensus view is represented by 'presumed same' (counted as the same in the totals); records for which it is less certain whether the birds involved were the same or not are counted as different in the totals. An identical approach is applied to records of a particular species recurring at the same, or a nearby, locality after a lapse of time. In considering claims of more than one individual at the same or adjacent localities, the Committee requires firm evidence before more than one is accepted.
5. The status summary is based on the number of individuals that have occurred in the last 30 years, including the current year of the report. So for example, in the 2015 Report, the data will be based on the years 1986 to 2015 inclusive. Returning birds are excluded. The **Status** is defined as: **Extremely rare** – total number of birds 0, 1 or 2 in the last 30 years; **Very rare** – total number of birds 3–9 in that period; or **Rare** – total number of birds 10–35 in that period. No status is given for taxa where the total number of records is more than 35 for the most recent 30-year period. There are currently some 290–300 taxa on the British List which are currently assessed by BBRC and the spread across these categories is approximately 100 extremely rare, 80 very rare, 55 rare and 60 others. Those species for which our data are incomplete, for example when many records are still being assessed, or where historical records are still being sought, are termed **uncertain**. Also noted are **influxes**, **returnees** (if these comprise a significant proportion of each year's records, e.g. King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*) and instances of confirmed **breeding**. The **Trend** is based on a polynomial trend-line fitted to the ten-year moving average over the last 30 years (the ten-year average for 1986 is the mean for 1977–86, that for 1987 is the mean for 1978–87 and so on up to the current report year). Trends are not given for Extremely rare and Very rare taxa, simply because there are insufficient data. A trend is shown for Rare taxa, which typically occur at a rate of around one a year, but of course the data are still sparse at this level and the trend shown is at best tentative. Even for more regular rarities, short-term peaks and troughs will affect the trend statement, and readers should bear this in mind, but in most cases it is a realistic interpretation of how each species is currently faring. However, if there has been a marked change in the trend during the 30-year period concerned (for example, species that have increased noticeably), the term '**recent**' may be used to denote the last 15 years.
6. The breeding and wintering ranges for each species are given in parentheses at the end of each species account.
7. The following abbreviations have been used in the main text of the report: BO = Bird Observatory, CP = Country Park, GP = Gravel-pit, Resr = Reservoir, SF = Sewage-farm.

Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*
North American races *B. c. interior/parvipes* (0, 8, 0) *Very rare, last in 2014 (three)*

2014 Lancashire & North Merseyside Todderstaffe Hall and nearby areas, Poulton-le-Fylde, two 2CY+, 16th–31st December, photo (C. G. Batty, F. Bird *et al.*).

BBRC's approach to this difficult subspecies group was more fully explained in the 2012 report (*Brit. Birds* 106: 574). We welcome submissions of any post-1950 records that have not appeared in BBRC reports.

(Canada & N USA, introduced W Europe. Race *interior* breeds NE Canada from Hudson Bay E to Baffin Island, & NW Greenland. Winters SE USA. Race *parvipes* breeds W Alaska, E to Yukon Territory. Most winter Washington & Oregon, some also NE Texas.)

Cackling Goose *Branta hutchinsii* (0, [10], 0) *Uncertain – recent taxonomy change*

2014 Argyll Loch Gruinart RSPB and nearby areas, Islay, two 2CY+, 9th October 2013 to 22nd February, one to 26th March, photo (C. Bradshaw *et al.*).
2009 Argyll Cornaigmore and nearby areas, Tiree, 2CY+, 8th January to 7th March, photo (J. Bowler *et al.*).
2009 Dumfries & Galloway Caerlaverock WWT and nearby areas, 8CY+, 4th October 2008 to 22nd April (when 9CY+), photo (R. Ahmed *et al.*); same as Dumfries & Galloway 2008, below.
2008 Dumfries & Galloway Caerlaverock WWT and nearby areas, 8CY+, 4th October into 2009, photo (T. Reid *et al.*); same as Dumfries & Galloway 2007, below.
2007 Dumfries & Galloway Caerlaverock WWT and nearby areas, 6CY+, from 13th October 2006 to 10th April (when 7CY+); same, 15th October to 25th November, photo (T. Reid *et al.*); same as Dumfries & Galloway 2006, below.
2006 Dumfries & Galloway Caerlaverock WWT and nearby areas, 5CY+, from 17th October 2005 to 21st April (when 6CY+); same, 13th October into 2007, photo (T. Reid *et al.*); same as Dumfries & Galloway 2005, below.
2005 Dumfries & Galloway Caerlaverock WWT and nearby areas, 5CY+, 17th October 2005 into 2006, photo (T. Reid *et al.*); same as Dumfries & Galloway 2004, below.
2005 Moray & Nairn Loch Spynie, 1CY+, 23rd October, photo (A. P. Jensen, R. Proctor).
2004 Dumfries & Galloway Caerlaverock WWT and nearby areas, 3CY+, 13th October 2003 to 13th April (when 4CY+); same, 3rd October to 24th December, photo (T. Reid *et al.*); same as Dumfries & Galloway 2003, below. Caerlaverock WWT, two 2CY+, from 12th December 2003 to 5th May (when 3CY+), photo (T. Reid *et al.*); same as Loch Ken, Dumfries & Galloway 2003, below.
2003 Dumfries & Galloway Caerlaverock WWT and nearby areas, 2CY+, 22nd September 2002 to 8th March (when 3CY+); same, 13th October into 2004, photo (T. Reid *et al.*); same as Dumfries & Galloway 2002, below. Loch Ken, two 2CY+, 20th October, then Caerlaverock WWT, 12th December into 2004, photo (R. & S. Chidwick, T. Reid *et al.*).
2002 Dumfries & Galloway Caerlaverock WWT and nearby areas, 2CY+, 22nd September into 2003, photo (T. Cameron, T. Reid *et al*). Caerlaverock WWT, 1CY+, 18th October (T. Reid *et al.*).
1984 Argyll Craigens, Islay, 2CY+, 26th March (R. A. Hume).
1976 Lancashire & North Merseyside Plex Moss and Formby Moss, 1CY+, 14th–28th November, photo (J. G. & P. M. Hall, M. Jones *et al.*).

This is the first time that Cackling Goose has featured in a BBRC report, although in the 1958 report 'a small, dark, short-necked Canada Goose, distinctly smaller than the Barnacle Geese (*B. leucopsis*) it accompanied and clearly an example of one of the small races of *B. canadensis* breeding in the North American Arctic' was described from Islay, Argyll, on 5th April 1958. Listed as 'Canada Goose' it was evidently what we now call Cackling Goose (Pyman 1960). In the absence of further detail, the 1958 record was not accepted, so the first accepted British record of Cackling Goose comes from Lancashire & North Merseyside in 1976. Supported by photographs and a brief description, and although entirely consistent in appearance with nominate *hutchinsii*, or 'Richardson's Cackling Goose', it was not accepted as a *certain* example of this form; the search for the first acceptable Richardson's Cackling Goose continues with later records.

Although a large number of claims remain in circulation, the pattern of occurrence appears clear: autumn arrivals in Britain accompany Arctic-breeding geese, then typically remain here for the winter with their hosts. Such 'abmigration' is well known in other vagrant geese: for example, Lesser White-fronted Geese *Anser erythropus* have accompanied 'Russian White-fronted Geese' *A. a. albifrons* to Britain, as have Red-breasted Geese *B. ruficollis* with 'Dark-bellied Brent Geese' *B. b. bernicla*, and Snow Geese *A. caerulescens* with Pink-footed Geese *A. brachyrhynchus* (e.g. Cottridge & Vinicombe 1996). To minimise the inclusion of escaped birds in our statistics, a necessary precursor for acceptance is that Cackling Geese accompany other wild geese; the records accepted so far involve birds with Pink-footed Geese from Iceland or Greenland, 'Greenland White-fronted Geese' *A. a. flavirostris* from Greenland, and Barnacle Geese from the Greenland and Svalbard populations. Given the large number of feral and escaped wildfowl in Britain, we consider this is a sensible approach, but will keep the situation under review.

As with other geese considered by BBRC, a presumption is made that birds seen with the same 'carrier' population in the same area in consecutive winters are returning birds, and this is reflected in the statistics. Andy Stoddart's paper 'Cackling Goose: new to Britain' will appear in *BB* next month.

(Breeds locally in Aleutian Islands, also in tundra zone of W & N coastal Alaska, USA, & N Canada from Yukon Territory to Southampton & S Baffin Islands, Nunavut; winters in USA & Mexico in three discrete regions: Washington to N California, New Mexico & NW Texas to N Mexico, & Texas Gulf coast to NE Mexico.)

Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* (7, 77, 2) *About two per year + returnees; stable*

Cumbria Whitrigglees Moss, Kirkbride, 3CY+, 31st January (K. Dawson, S. Mott).
Essex Frinton-on-Sea, 2CY+, 30th September (P. Brayshaw); also seen Suffolk.
Suffolk Landguard BO, 2CY+, 30th September (P. R. Oldfield *et al.*); also seen Essex.

(Breeds Taimyr Peninsula, Siberia. Migrates SW to winter coastal regions of W Black Sea in Romania & N Bulgaria. Small numbers regularly winter Netherlands, Greece & Turkey. Some may still use former wintering areas along Caspian Sea.)

Black Duck *Anas rubripes* (0, 40, 1) *Rare, about one per year; stable*

Isles of Scilly Off Samson, then Great Pool and Abbey Pool, Tresco, 2CY+ male, 19th January to 21st April, photo (J. Higginson, J. Pender *et al.*).

(Breeds E North America from Manitoba to Labrador, Canada, & S to North Carolina, USA. Most are resident or dispersive but N breeders migrate to winter coastal SE USA.)

Blue-winged Teal *Anas discors* (10, 262, 1) *About six per year; stable or decreasing*

Lincolnshire Donna Nook, 2CY+ male, 12th–28th April, photo (S. Lorand *et al.*).
Orkney The Shunan, Mainland, 3CY+ male, 17th January to 12th April, photo (A. Forsyth *et al.*); presumed same as Orkney 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 570–571).
2014 North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg RSPB, 2CY+ male, 14th–28th June, photo (*Brit. Birds* 108: 570–571); note revised dates.

A single new bird in 2015 is the poorest showing since the blank year of 2008, emphasising the slight downward trend since the turn of the century. Given the level of observer coverage in most areas, it seems reasonable to conclude that there has been a genuine decline in occurrences. The Donna Nook bird was the tenth for Lincolnshire, which now ranks seventh in the county totals for this species in Britain. Predictably, the top county remains Cornwall (24), with Norfolk and the Outer Hebrides in joint second place with 20. Orkney followed by Yorkshire complete the top five.

Spring arrivals are not unexpected, with 34% of all records found between March and June, compared with 49% in autumn (August–October); winter records are less common, with just 15% being discovered between November and February.

(Breeds from S Alaska, across much of temperate Canada to SC USA. Migratory, wintering S USA, Mexico, Caribbean & N South America.)

King Eider *Somateria spectabilis* (68, 176, 2) *About 4–5 per year + returnees; stable or increasing*

Cornwall Maenporth, 2CY male, 27th January to 21st March, photo (S. C. Votier *et al.*).
Fife Ruddons Point, Largo Bay, 3CY+ female, 30th November 2014 to 7th April (when 4CY+), photo (see also *Brit. Birds* 108: 573), presumed same 27th December into 2016, photo (K. Blasco, W. Irvine *et al.*).
Moray & Nairn Burghead and Spey Bay, 8CY male, 4th April (J. Austin, R. Belter, R. Godden *et al.*), presumed same Spey Bay, 20th June, photo (M. Cook *et al.*), and off Carse of Delnies, 19th–24th September (J. Gordon, G. Prest); presumed same as Moray & Nairn 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 573); also seen North-east Scotland.
North-east Scotland Ythan Estuary, 8CY male, 5th April to 19th June, photo (S. Preddy *et al.*) (plate 301), presumed same St Combs, 14th April, photo (D. J. & J. Franklin *et al.*), and Peterhead, 12th May (M. Innes); also seen Moray & Nairn.
Outer Hebrides North Rona, 3CY+ male, 22nd June, photo (S. Elliott, J. Harden *et al.*).
Shetland Basta Voe and Bluemull Sound, Yell, 2CY female, 4th September 2014 to 13th February (when 3CY), photo (see also *Brit. Birds* 108: 573), presumed same Baltasound and Haroldswick, Unst, 7th–29th June, photo (R. J. Brookes *et al.* per Shetland Recorder).

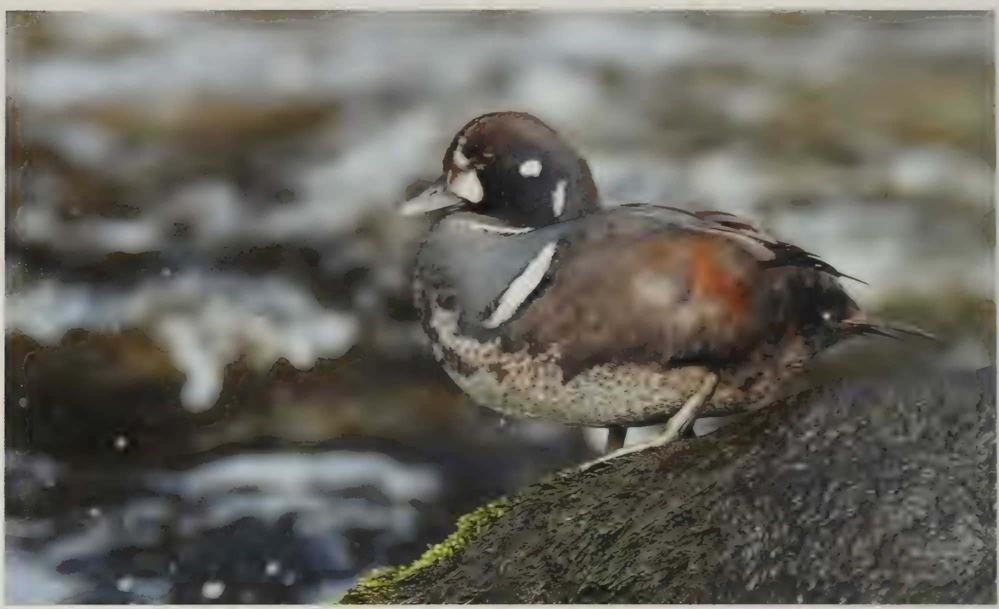
(Breeds Kanin Peninsula E across Arctic Siberia, including Novaya Zemlya & W Svalbard, Arctic Alaska, N Canada & N Greenland. European population winters along ice-free coasts of White Sea, N Norway & Iceland. Pacific population winters Bering Sea.)

Richard Stonier

301. Adult (8CY) male King Eider *Somateria spectabilis*, Ythan Estuary, North-east Scotland, May 2015.

Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus* (6, 12, 2) *Rare, about one every three years*

Highland Brora, 2CY+ female, 17th February to 30th April, photo (D. MacAskill *et al.*).
North-east Scotland River Don, Aberdeen, 2CY male, 3rd January to 21st May, photo (R. Leslie *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 108: plates 66, 111; plate 302).



302. First-winter (2CY) male Harlequin Duck *Histrionicus histrionicus*, River Don, Aberdeen, April 2015.

(Atlantic population breeds Iceland, S Greenland, & E Canada from S Ellesmere Island to Labrador & Gulf of St Lawrence. Pacific population breeds NE Russia from Lake Baikal E to Kamchatka & S Sakhalin, Alaska & W Canada S to Oregon, USA. Resident Iceland. Other populations disperse to coasts S of breeding range.)

Black Scoter *Melanitta americana* (0, 13, 0) *Rare, about one every 2–3 years*

Northumberland Cheswick Sands and nearby areas, 3CY+ male, 20th January to 2nd March, 26th March, photo (R. Hopson *et al.*); presumed same as Angus & Dundee 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 573).

(Breeds Siberian tundra from Yana River E to Alaska, & N Canada E to Newfoundland. In North Atlantic, winters along coasts of E USA, N to South Carolina, & inland on Great Lakes. Elsewhere, winters ice-free seas along both coasts of N Pacific Ocean, S to N Japan & California.)

Pacific Diver *Gavia pacifica* (0, 7, 0) *Very rare + returnees, last in 2013 (two)*

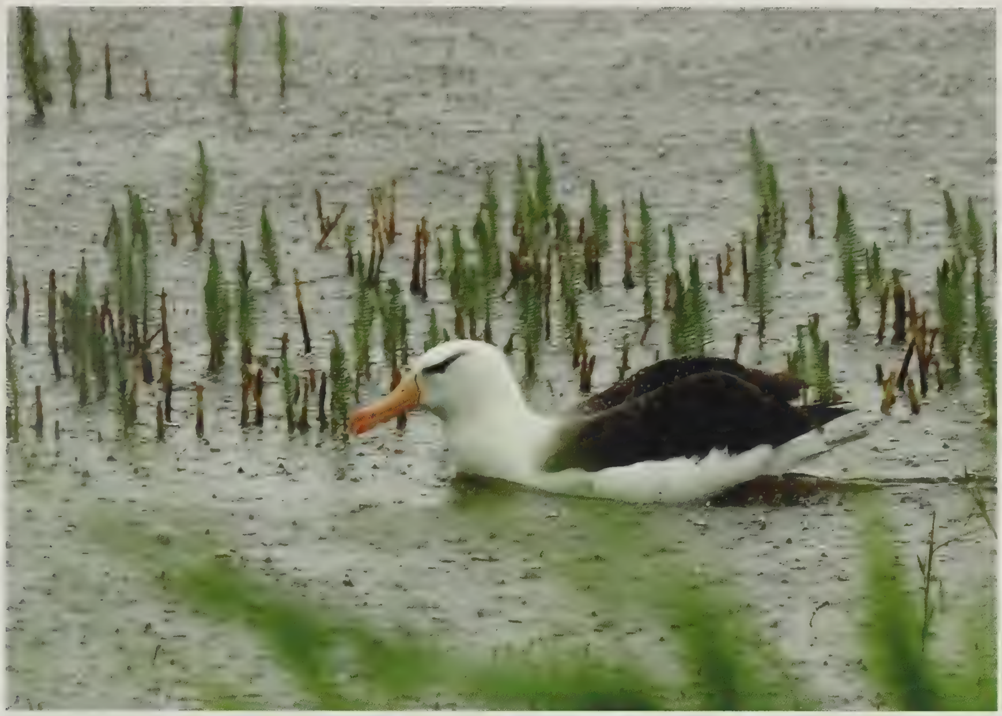
Cornwall Marazion, 8CY+, 22nd November 2014 to 14th March (when 9CY+), photo, presumed same 30th April to 4th May, photo (D. Helliar, P. Whiteman *et al.*), and ranging from Newlyn to Perranuthnoe, 26th November into 2016, photo (L. Gwynn, B. Porter *et al.*); presumed same as Cornwall 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 574). Dodman Point and Pendower, 4CY+, 18th–19th February, photo (S. C. Votier *et al.*), presumed same Maenporth, 30th–31st December, photo (S. C. Votier *et al.*); presumed same as Dodman Point, Cornwall 2013 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 574).

(Breeds NE Siberia from lower Indigirka River E to Chukotskiy Peninsula, & N North America from Alaska E to Hudson Bay & S Baffin Island. Winters North Pacific Ocean, in Asia S to Japan & E China, & North America S to Baja California & Sonora, Mexico.)

Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris* (1, 27, 1) *Rare, about one every 1–2 years, but recent increase*

Suffolk Minsmere RSPB, 6CY+, 12th July, photo (P. Hobbs, I. Salkeld *et al.*) (plate 303).

Given the continued presence of a well-watched Black-browed Albatross just across the North Sea (visiting a Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* colony on the German island of Helgoland for its second summer), it was no surprise to hear that this individual had ventured over to the English east coast. Much more surprising was that, rather than appearing at a seabird colony or passing a seawatching headland, it materialised on a shallow reedbed pool at the RSPB's flagship


Peter Hobbs

303. Adult (6CY+) Black-browed Albatross *Thalassarche melanophris*, Minsmere, Suffolk, July 2015.

Minsmere reserve during a torrential downpour, perhaps drawn in by a small gathering of Mute Swans *Cygnus olor*! The bird departed when the rain eased, and this brief appearance was the first record for Suffolk.

Albatrosses can be extremely long-lived – ringing has shown that Wandering Albatrosses *Diomedea exulans* can live beyond 50 years old and it is thought that some Laysan Albatrosses *Phoebastria immutabilis* can live to 70 years old. Conceivably, the German/Suffolk bird *could* be the same as one or all of the Black-browed Albatrosses seen since 1967 in Scottish Gannet colonies: the Bass Rock (Lothian) in 1967–69, Hermaness (Shetland) 1972–95 and Sula Sgeir (Outer Hebrides) 2005–07.

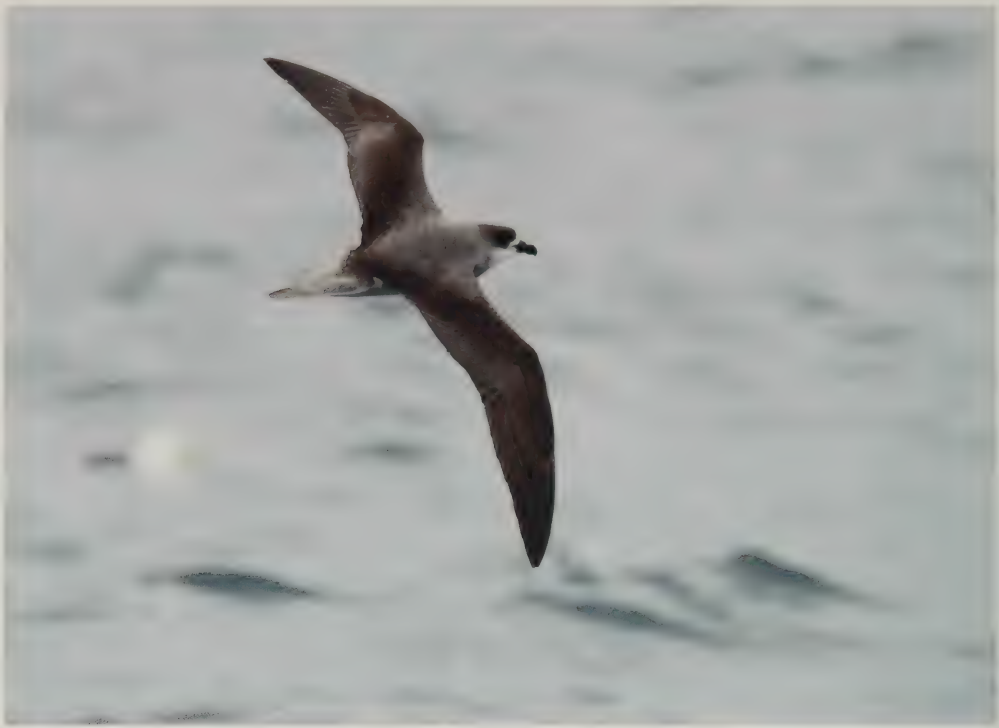
(Breeds on islands in S South Atlantic & Indian Oceans. Outside breeding season disperses N throughout southern oceans N to Tropic of Capricorn.)

Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae* (0, 5, 1) *Very rare, last in 2014 (two), but also see Zino's/Fea's Petrel*

Isles of Scilly 18 km NE of Scilly, 1CY+, 16th August, photo (R. L. Flood *et al.*) (plate 304).

One of the more evocative submissions in 2015 described this almost unprecedented experience in British waters of a Fea's Petrel at point-blank range for several minutes as it cruised around the MV *Sapphire*. It was the undoubted highlight of the autumn for those lucky enough to be on board. The resulting photographs enabled close scrutiny of the bill and body structure, leaving no room for doubt that this was a Fea's rather than Zino's Petrel *P. madeira*. Unfortunately, it was not possible to allocate this bird even further down the taxonomic line, although it seems likely to have been a female 'Desertas Petrel' *P. f. deserta* rather than a 'Cape Verde Petrel' *P. f. feae*. Structure and plumage were both in the wide overlap zone between the two races.

Nevertheless, this is still only the sixth individual to have been seen well enough to allocate to species level – all of these involved Fea's Petrel and all but one was photographed in the waters around Scilly (the other was a bird photographed from a boat off Yorkshire in 2014). It seems unlikely that this situation will change anytime soon, but with geolocators suggesting that Zino's Petrel does wander northwards (Zino *et al.* 2011) and a record of Bermuda Petrel *P. cahow* west


Jim Almond

304. Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae*, 18 km NE of Scilly, August 2015.

of Ireland (Carmody & Hobbs 2015), how long will it be before one of these species is confirmed in British waters?

(Breeds on Bugio, Desertas, & Cape Verde Islands.)

Zino's/Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira/feae* (0, 56, 2) *About two per year; stable or increasing*

Cornwall Porthgwarra, 1CY+, 5th August (K. Milsom).
Yorkshire Flamborough Head, 1CY+, 8th September (P. A. Lassey, B. Richards), presumed same Scarborough, 8th September (N. W. Addey, S. Wignill), and Spurn, 9th September, photo (T. D. Jones *et al.*).
2014 Northumberland Farne Islands, 1CY+, 21st September (D. Roche *et al.*), presumed same as Northumberland 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 575–576).

(Breeding Zino's confined to C mountains of Madeira. Fea's breeds on Bugio, Desertas, & Cape Verde Islands.)

Yelkouan Shearwater *Puffinus yelkouan* (0, 1, 0) *Extremely rare*

2008 Devon Berry Head, 1CY+, 29th July, photo (M. Darlaston, M. Langman).

Full details of this record, which has the distinction of involving the 600th species for the British List, appeared in *BB* in August 2016 (Darlaston & Langman 2016).

(Breeds locally in C & E Mediterranean from S France to Crete, also Adriatic, Aegean and, probably, Black Seas. Disperses widely within Mediterranean & Black Seas.)

Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* (0, 4, 1) *Very rare, all since 2001*

Cornwall Gwennap Head, Porthgwarra, 2CY+, 28th August (M. Birch, M. G. Oxlade *et al.*).

(Rare breeder Cape Verde Islands, has bred Azores & suspected Canary Islands. Elsewhere breeds Caribbean & Red Seas, Indian & E Pacific Oceans. Resident or dispersive in non-breeding season but distribution at sea poorly known.)

Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* (247, 251, 3) *About 3–4 per year, occasional breeding; stable*

Isles of Scilly Lower Moors and Rose Hill, St Mary's, 2CY+ male, 14th–16th May, photo (A. Bone, M. Sawyer *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 108: plate 244), presumed same Carn Gwaval, St Mary's, 9th June, found dead, photo (M. Goodey, N. Lishman). Porth Hellick, St Mary's, 2CY+ male, 15th–18th May, photo (R. Hathway *et al.*).
Lincolnshire Kirkby on Bain GP, 2CY+ male, 28th June, photo (per birding information services); also seen Suffolk, Yorkshire.
Suffolk Lakenheath Fen RSPB, 2CY+ male, 16th May to 26th June, photo (P. Goffin *et al.*); also seen Lincolnshire, Yorkshire.
Yorkshire Old Moor RSPB, 2CY+ male, 30th June to 9th July, 14th July to 31st July, photo (per birding information services) (plate 305), presumed same Swillington Ings, 2CY+ male, in song, 11th–12th July, photo (P. R. Morris *et al.*); also seen Lincolnshire, Suffolk.

Peter Garrity

305. Male Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus*, Old Moor, Yorkshire, July 2015.

Following a protracted but unsuccessful attempt to attract a mate in Suffolk, what is thought to have been the same male continued north via Lincolnshire to Yorkshire, where it established another territory and remained for another month.

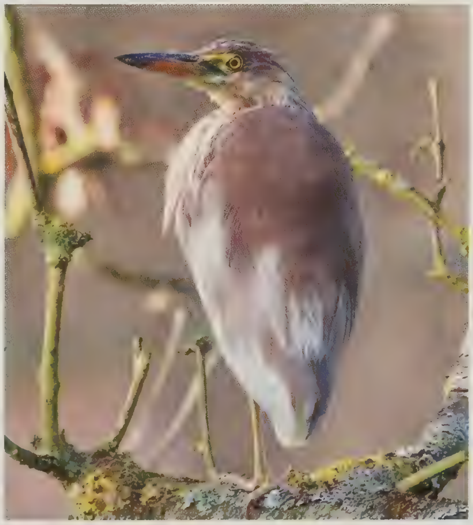
(Widespread but local in Europe N to 53°N. To E, breeds to 60°N in European Russia, & E to Kazakhstan & NW China. Migratory, wintering mainly E Africa, S from Sudan & Ethiopia. Other populations largely resident or dispersive in N Indian subcontinent, sub-Saharan Africa & Australia.)

Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* (0, 1, 0) *Extremely rare*

2014 Kent Hythe and Saltwood, 2CY, 17th January to 13th March, photo, found dead on 25th March, DNA analysis (M. Dawson, I. Roberts *et al.*) (plate 306).

This was one of the more surprising highlights of 2014. The bird was originally identified as a Squacco Heron, but the early views and first photographs showed an intriguing dark lower border to the breast feathering. As body moult progressed, the bird began to show traces of maroon feathering in the neck sides – the beginnings of breeding plumage and a firm indication that the bird was a Chinese Pond Heron. This identification was later confirmed by DNA analysis.

As a potential 'first', the record was then passed to BOURC. Although it was considered by some to be an unlikely vagrant, the BOURC assessment recognised an emerging pattern of extralimital occurrences in Europe, Asia and North America. Taken together with the species' rarity in captivity in Europe, this pushed the balance of evidence towards a natural origin and


Paul Rowe

306. First-winter (2CY) Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus*, Hythe, Kent, March 2014.

it was accepted unanimously onto Category A of the British List.

The identification of an earlier record – an adult at Eccles-on-Sea, Norfolk, on 31st October 2004 and then at East Dean, Hampshire, on 13th November 2004 – was accepted by BBRC, but BBRC and BOURC assessments both expressed concern that it remained in breeding plumage in late autumn. This tipped the balance of probability in favour of it being of captive origin. This record was discussed in BBRC's 2004 report (*Brit. Birds* 98: 641–642) and was formally published in Appendix 3 of the 2008 report (*Brit. Birds* 102: 599).

(Breeds China from Liaoning and Nei Mongol provinces S to Guangdong, Guangxi, Hainan and Yunnan, S Japan, Taiwan, W to Assam and Andaman Is., India, and S into N Burma and N Vietnam. Winters S China and SE Asia S to Singapore and Borneo.)

Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* (68, 89, 10) *About 2–3 per year; increasing*

Anglesey Cemlyn Bay, 2CY, 30th June, photo (D. Wilde, D. Wright *et al.*).

Cleveland Saltholme RSPB, 3CY+, 18th and 26th June, photo (S. Taylor, S. Truby *et al.*).

Cornwall Trethewey then Lands End, 2CY+, 5th–15th May, photo (D. S. Flumm, P. St Pierre, A. Richardson *et al.*), presumed same Marazion Marsh RSPB, 6th–10th June (D. S. Flumm *et al.*). Kynance Cove then Lizard and Goonhilly Down, 3CY+, 16th–23rd May, photo (K. Pembroke, P. J. Smale *et al.*). Nanjizal, 25th–26th October (L. G. O'Neill *et al.*).

Devon Prawle Point, 3CY+, 9th–16th May, photo (P. M. Mayer *et al.*). Beesands, 3CY+, 15th–17th May, photo (P. Sanders *et al.*).

Isles of Scilly Porth Hellick and Lower Moors, St Mary's, 2CY, 14th May to 3rd June, photo (T. Rogers *et al.*).

Lincolnshire Kirkby on Bain GP, 2CY+, 27th June, photo (R. Hayes, J. K. Shone *et al.*).

Sussex Southease, 3CY+, 3rd July, photo (C. J. R. Barfield *et al.*).

2014 Cambridgeshire Ouse Washes, 2CY+, 9th–10th June (M. Burdekin, A. L. Cooper *et al.*).

1982 Hampshire Needs Ore, 2CY+, 11th–12th June (W. Loughborough, J. Venner per Hampshire Recorder).

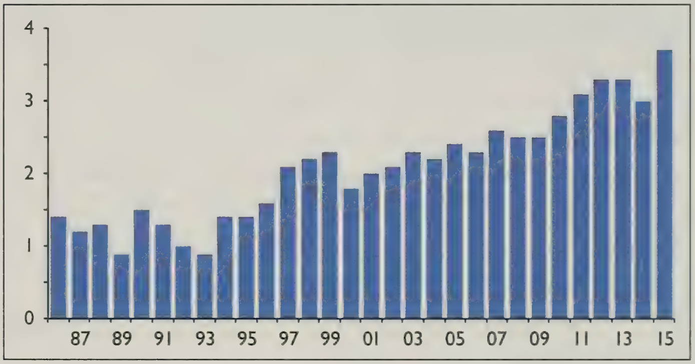


Fig. 1. Rolling ten-year means of the numbers of Squacco Herons *Ardeola ralloides* in Britain – hence the value of 3.7 for 2015 is the mean for the ten-year period 2006–15 inclusive. The bar chart clearly shows the trend towards increasing numbers reaching Britain over the past 30 years.

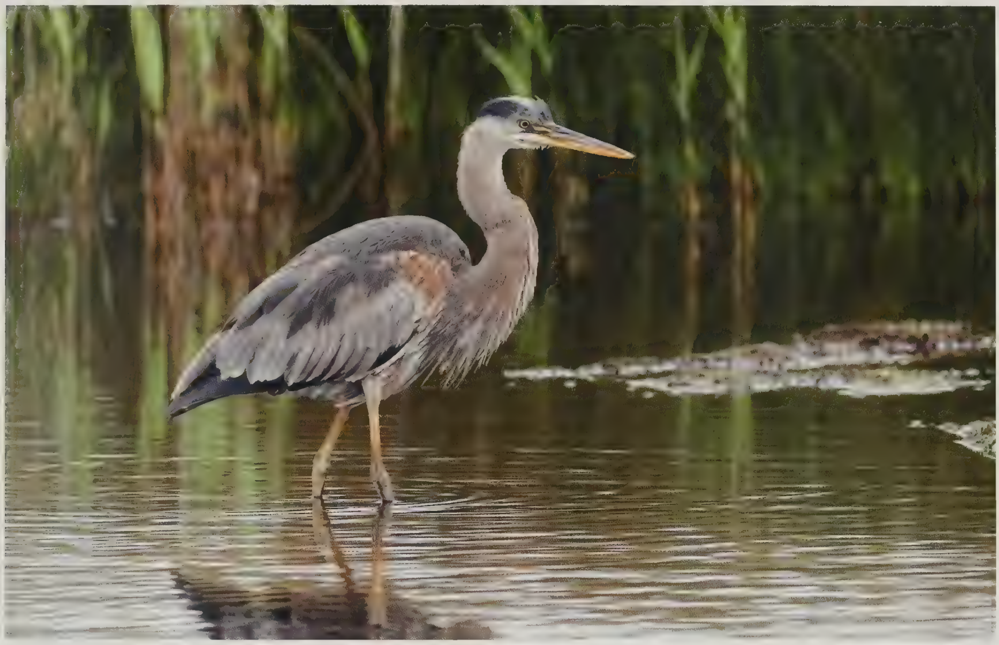
The steady increase continues (fig. 1), with the ten in 2015 being the highest annual total (ahead of eight in 2007 and six in 1990). As mentioned in the 2011 report, the bias is to the southwest (42%) and southeast (20%), perhaps suggesting an Iberian origin for many British vagrants.

(Breeds Mediterranean basin from S Spain to Black Sea & E to Kazakhstan, with large population in Danube Delta. Northern populations migratory, wintering N tropical Africa. African population largely resident.)

Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias* (0, 1, 1) *Extremely rare, one previous record in 2007*

Isles of Scilly Lower Moors and nearby areas on St Mary's, also Great Pool, Tresco, and Great Pool, Bryher, 2CY, 14th April to 6th May, photo (E. A. Fisher, C. Smith *et al.*) (*Brit Birds* 108: plate 224; 109: 459–460, plate 307).

The vagrancy potential of Great Blue Heron had been much discussed before the first for Britain, on Scilly in December 2007. However, the odds of the same observer finding both the first and the second British records of this (or in fact any other) species, at the same site, were almost



Michael McKee

307. First-winter (2CY) Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*, St Mary's, Scilly, May 2015.

infinitely longer. Yet that was precisely the scenario faced by Ashley Fisher on 14th April 2015. After the triumph of the 2007 bird, we can only imagine his shock after entering the Hilda Quick hide on Lower Moors, first hearing and then seeing a potential Great Blue Heron, alongside a Grey Heron *A. cinerea*. Well qualified to make such an identification, he rapidly checked through the features and then rushed home for a camera. Unfortunately, when he returned to the scene the bird had flown, but luckily Cavell Smith had photographed it from the ISBG hide during the same period. Thanks to Cavell's terrific images, the identification was rubber-stamped; and the bird was quickly relocated in Old Town Bay. Although initially difficult to pin down, this bird proved to be a long-stayer, unlike the one-day bird of 2007.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Western Palearctic records of this species come predominantly from the southern and western archipelagos. The Azores, with 33 records, is a clear leader and it has reached Cape Verde and the Canary Islands too. The timing of the first and only record for France, an adult on Ouessant on 11th–27th April 1996, closely matches that of this second Scilly bird.

So where will the third for Britain be found? It would be hard to bet against a record on the south coast, or perhaps Glamorgan or the Gwent levels. Surely it won't be at Lower Moors... The species has undergone a large and statistically significant increase in North America of 132% over the last 40 years, equating to a 23.4% increase per decade (Christmas Bird Counts) so that third record is a very real possibility.

(Breeds S Canada from British Columbia to Nova Scotia, S through USA to C America, & West Indies to N Venezuela. Northern populations migratory, wintering to S of breeding range.)

Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* (23, 221, 15) *About seven per year; stable*

Cleveland Greatham Creek, 1CY, 1st August, photo (I. Foster); also seen Northumberland.

Cornwall Marazion and nearby areas, 3CY+, 7th–8th June, photo (D. S. Flumm, B. Hawker, D. Mays *et al.*); also seen Devon, Isles of Scilly.

Devon Withleigh, 3CY+, 5th June, photo (per S. Powles), presumed same Newton Abbot, 5th June, photo (C. Stevens); also seen Cornwall, Isles of Scilly.

Dorset Arne RSPB, 1CY, 8th–9th August, photo (M. J. Bruce *et al.*), presumed same Portland then Weymouth, 11th August, photo (D. & G. Walbridge *et al.*), and Abbotsbury then West

308. Juvenile (1CY) Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*, Spurn, Yorkshire, August 2015.

Bexington, 11th–12th August, photo (A. Barrett, M. J. Morse, A. Simon); also seen Kent, Sussex.

East Glamorgan Nantyffyllon, 3CY+, 26th May (P. Parsons); also seen Gower, Gwent, Pembrokeshire.

Essex Clacton-on-Sea, 1CY, 28th August, photo (S. Jefford per birding information services); also seen Suffolk.

Gower Afan Argoed Forest Park, 3CY+, 26th May (M. Hipkin); also seen East Glamorgan, Gwent, Pembrokeshire.

Gwent Coed Morgan, Abergavenny, 3CY+, 26th May (J. Holmes); also seen East Glamorgan, Gower, Pembrokeshire.

Hampshire Southsea, 1CY+, 30th July, photo (C. Hall, D. Hardman per Hampshire Recorder).

Isles of Scilly Flying west over St Mary's, then Wingletang, St Agnes, 3CY+, 8th June (R. Hathway, J. Headon, D. Page *et al.*); also seen Cornwall, Devon.

Kent Lydd-on-Sea and Dungeness, 1CY, 7th August, photo (D. Brown, P. Trodd *et al.*); also seen Dorset, Sussex.

Lincolnshire Kirkby on Bain GP, 3CY+, 22nd May, photo (G. P. Catley); also seen Norfolk, Yorkshire. Tetney and coastal areas to the south, 1CY, 3rd–4th August (K. Collett), presumed same Gibraltar Point, 5th–8th August, photo (A. Bentley *et al.*). Covenham Resr, 1CY+, 11th August (G. Langman, K. Robinson).

Norfolk Scolt Head then Holme Dunes and Hunstanton, 3CY+, 21st–22nd May, photo (G. F. Hibberd, N. M. Lawton, R. Smith); also seen Lincolnshire, Yorkshire.

North-east Scotland Loch of Strathbeg RSPB, 1CY, 6th–24th August, darvic ring F05P, photo (R. Humpidge *et al.*).

Northumberland Haggerston, 1CY, 2nd August, darvic ring, photo (J. Holmes, R. Waite); also seen Cleveland.

Nottinghamshire Hoveringham, 1CY+, 4th August (J. A. Hopper, P. Saunders).

Pembrokeshire Skomer, 3CY+, 25th May, photo (M. S. & T. J. Wallen); also seen East Glamorgan, Gower, Gwent.

Suffolk Landguard, 1CY, 28th August (C. J. Bridge *et al.*); also seen Essex.

Surrey Staines Moor, 1CY, 18th September, photo (L. M. Dingain *et al.*).

Sussex Rye Harbour, 1CY, 12th August (M. F. Austin), presumed same Bexhill-on-Sea and nearby areas, 14th August to 5th September, photo (H. & R. Gammie, I. Standivan *et al.*); also seen Dorset, Kent.

Yorkshire Midhope, 3CY+, 23rd May, photo (per G. J. Speight); also seen Norfolk, Lincolnshire.

Blacktoft Sands, 1CY, 3rd August, photo (C. A. Cornish, M. Cox, P. Short). Beacon Ponds, Easington, and Spurn, 1CY, 3rd–10th August, darvic ring F05R, photo (J. M. Turton *et al.*) (plate 308). Wykeham Forest, Sawdon, 1CY+, 5th August (D. Armitage), presumed same Mickleby, 5th August (H. & R. N. Kelsh).

The 2015 total of 15 is the third highest, behind 1991 (23) and 2013 (18). It can hardly be termed an influx as it follows several years of relatively high numbers, from at least 2005. A similar surge of reports happened around 1990 but numbers then declined so it is too early to assume that the increase is a permanent one.

In the 2010 report, it was noted that while juveniles remain rare, they seem to be occurring more frequently. That was certainly true in 2015 with nine of the 12 aged birds in their first calendar year. Two of the birds carried rings, which showed they were from the same brood, ringed in June 2015 in the Ardennes, northern France, close to the Belgian border. One was encountered in North-east Scotland, the other in Yorkshire; the latter was later found dead near Madrid, Spain, on 20th October. The origins of these two birds are somewhat closer than that of the ringed bird seen in 2010, which came from northern Hungary (*Brit. Birds* 104: 570–571).

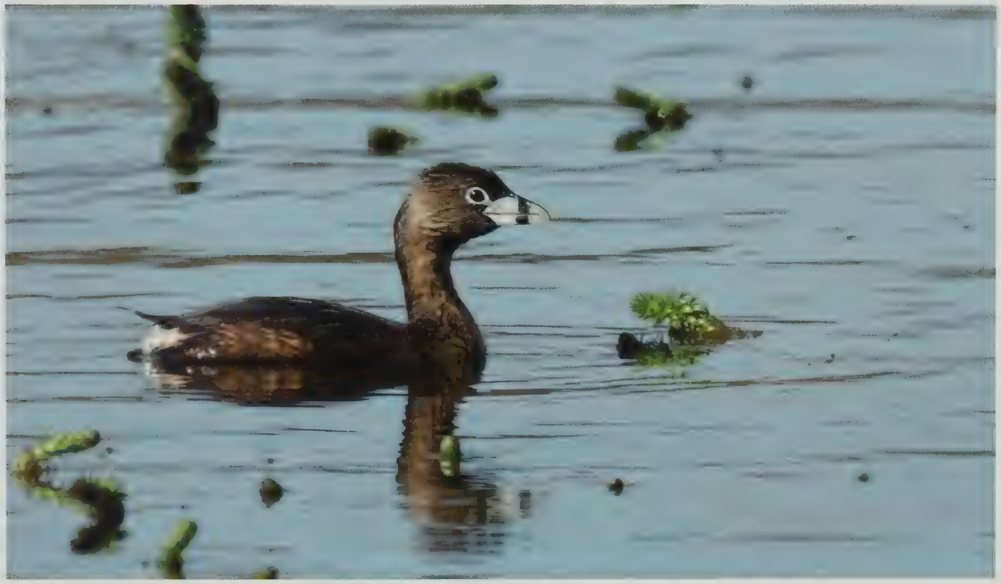
(Breeds C Iberia, N & E France through C Europe to Russia & small numbers into N Greece & Turkey. To E, breeds widely in forested temperate regions of Russia & Siberia to Russian Far East. Most are migratory, wintering Africa, S & SE Asia.)

Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps* (0, 43, 1) *Rare, about one per year; stable*

Gloucestershire Severn Estuary, Berkeley, 2CY+, 24th April, photo (P. J. Taylor *et al.*); also seen Lancashire & North Merseyside.
Lancashire & North Merseyside Leighton Moss RSPB, 2CY+, 25th April to 4th May, photo (K. Kelly *et al.*) (plate 309); also seen Gloucestershire.

Photographs showing the shape of the band on the bill and dark marks towards the tip of the mandibles confirm that the Gloucestershire and Lancashire records relate to just one individual. If the same level of scrutiny had been available in earlier decades, perhaps the total number of records would be somewhat lower; it is conceivable that one or two wandering individuals accounted for a number of records in past years.

(Breeds throughout North America from C Canada S through USA to C America, the Caribbean & much of South America. Northern populations migratory, wintering S USA & Mexico.)



Jon Worthington

309. Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*, Leighton Moss, Lancashire & N Merseyside, April 2016.

George Gay

310. Adult (2CY+) male Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius*, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, October 2015.

Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius* (0, 7, 1) *Very rare, last in 2014*

Orkney North Ronaldsay, 2CY+ male, 25th September into 2016, photo (M. Warren *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 109: plate 32; plate 310).

(Breeds Alaska E to Canadian Maritime Provinces, S throughout Canada & USA from California E to Pennsylvania & Maryland, & S to Baja California, Mexico. Northern populations migratory, wintering from USA S throughout C America to N Colombia.)

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus* (2, 74, 11) *About three per year, influx 2011 (29); recent increase*

Cleveland Seaton Snook, 1CY female, 12th November, photo (I. Forrest).
Fair Isle 1CY female, 12th–21st September, photo (L. V. Gregory, D. Parnaby *et al.*).
Isle of May 1CY, 10th–12th October, photo (A. Denton, B. Outram, D. Steel).
Kent Pegwell Bay then Sandwich Bay, 1CY, 23rd September, photo (N. R. Davies, K. Ellis, I. Hodgson, A. M. Lipczynski, P. Milton, M. Sutherland).
Lincolnshire Donna Nook, 1CY, 27th–28th October, photo (S. Lorand *et al.*), presumed same Gibraltar Point, 29th October to 8th November, photo (N. A. Lound *et al.*); also seen Norfolk, Yorkshire.
Norfolk Warham Greens, 1CY female, 15th–16th November, photo (G. Hewson, E. Myers, M. A. Nash *et al.*), presumed same Snettisham RSPB, North Wootton and Flitcham, 17th November into 2016, photo (per birding information services) (plate 311); also seen Lincolnshire, Yorkshire.
Northumberland Warkworth, 1CY female, 9th September, photo (M. Sanderson, G. Sudlow).
Shetland Loch of Spiggie, 1CY, 23rd August (M. Mellor); presumed same, Durigarth, 1CY, 27th August (P. M. Ellis, G. F. Bell), presumed to be one of two (1CY male and 1CY female), Hillwell area, 30th August to 1st September, one or other remaining to 11th September, photo (J. N. Dymond, P. A. Harris, P. V. Harvey, R. Riddington *et al.*). Northdale and nearby areas, two 1CY females, 13th September to 2nd October, photo (R. J. Brookes, M. G. Pennington, B. H. Thomason *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 108: plate 408).

Steve Gantlett

311. Juvenile (1CY) female Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*, Flitcham, Norfolk, December 2015.

Sussex The Burgh, 1CY, 29th September to 10th October, photo (B. F. Forbes, A. R. Kitson, D. Mason, D. I. Smith *et al.*).
Yorkshire Spurn, 1CY, 25th October, photo (M. J. Pilsworth *et al.*); also seen Lincolnshire, Norfolk.

(Breeds from Ukraine E through Russia to c. 100°E, & S to Kazakhstan & NW China. Occasionally breeds Finland. Migratory, wintering throughout much of E & C Africa, & Indian subcontinent.)

Pallid x Hen Harrier *Circus macrourus x cyaneus* (0, 0, 1)

Yorkshire Spurn Point, 1CY, 29th September, photo (I. C. Whitehouse, J. Wozencroft *et al.*).

This is the first year in which a presumed hybrid merits its own entry and statistics in this report. This is an acknowledgment that we will surely continue to record such birds in Britain, which are known to occur in northern Europe, perhaps in increasing numbers as Pallid Harriers spread ever westwards. It is also an acknowledgment that whether or not a bird fits neatly into a species box might be less of a definitive requirement in the future birding scene. Other Pallid × Hen Harrier hybrids have been suspected in Britain in the past, notably a bird on Shetland in 2007 – and a submission for that individual would be welcome. The bird at Spurn showed all of the plumage features of a 1CY Pallid Harrier, but with a wing structure more in line with Hen Harrier. In the field, the bird had given a distinctly Pallid-like impression, and the most parsimonious explanation is that it was indeed a hybrid. Photographs suggest that what was almost certainly the same bird was seen on 29th October near Calais, France, having presumably passed unnoticed through East Anglia and the southeast.

Little Crake *Zapornia parva* (62, 40, 1)

Rare, about one every two years

Gloucestershire Slimbridge WWT, 1CY, 8th October, photo (A. Goulding, J. S. Lees *et al.*) (plate 312).

(Breeds across temperate steppe region from Austria E through Ukraine & European Russia to W Siberia, C Kazakhstan & NW China. Small numbers occasionally breed to N & W, reaching Netherlands, Finland & Spain. Most winter NE & E Africa, although some W to Senegal.)

Vern Wright

312. Juvenile (1CY) Little Crake *Zapornia parva*, Slimbridge WWT, Gloucestershire, October 2015.

American Coot *Fulica americana* (0, 8, 0) *Very rare, last in 2014 (two)*

Outer Hebrides Loch nam Feithean, North Uist, 1CY+, 16th November 2014 to 3rd April, photo (see also *Brit. Birds* 108: 581).

(Breeds temperate S Canada & USA, from Vancouver Island E to New Brunswick, & S throughout much of USA, Mexico, the West Indies & C America, with isolated populations in N & C Andes. Northern populations migratory, wintering S USA, occasionally N to S Ontario, Canada.)

Sandhill Crane *Grus canadensis* (0, 4, 0) *Very rare, last in 2009, 2011*

1991 Shetland Exnaboe and Sumburgh, Mainland, 2CY, 17th–27th September, photo (*Brit. Birds* 85: 522); note revised dates.

(Breeds NE Siberia & North America from Alaska E to Baffin Island, S to NE California to Michigan, & SE USA from S Mississippi to Florida, also Cuba. Northern breeders winter C & SW USA to NW & C Mexico. SE USA breeders resident.)

Little Bustard *Tetrax tetrax* (183, 27, 0) *Rare, about one every 2–3 years*

Yorkshire Fraisthorpe, 1CY+, 31st December 2014 to 1st January, photo (see also *Brit. Birds* 108: 581–582).

(Locally numerous on steppe grasslands of Iberian Peninsula with smaller populations S & C France, Italy, Sardinia & Ukraine. French populations migratory, wintering S France & Iberia, but Iberian breeders largely resident or disperse locally. To E, breeds widely S Russia to E Kazakhstan & winters SW Caspian Sea.)

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* (121, 347, 31) *About nine per year, influxes 1987 (33), 2012 (32), 2014 (34), occasional breeding; increasing*

Cambridgeshire Nene Washes RSPB, 2CY+ male and 2CY+ female, 16th–17th April, photo (M. Whiffin *et al.* per Cambridgeshire Recorder). Burwell Fen, 2CY+ male and 2CY+ female, 15th–26th May, photo (M. J. Ausden *et al.*); also seen Lincolnshire, Suffolk, Yorkshire. Burwell Fen, 2CY+ male and 2CY+ female, 15th June, photo (A. Hannaford per Cambridgeshire Recorder).

Cheshire & Wirral Ashton's Flash, 2CY+ male and 2CY+, 19th April, photo (P. Brewster *et al.*).

Dorset Abbotsbury, 2CY+ male, 3rd–10th April, photo (G. Tims *et al.*).

Essex Old Hall Marshes RSPB, 2CY+ male and 2CY+ female, 21st April, photo (M. Decouto, N. Lincoln, C. Mackenzie-Grieve). Bowers Marsh RSPB, two 2CY+, 26th May, photo (P. R. Wood *et al.*).

Kent Higham Marshes, five 2CY+, 14th April, eight 2CY+ on 15th, then two, 16th–19th April, photo (J. Hall *et al.*), presumed same Northward Hill, 2CY+ male and 2CY+ female, 16th April (A. Johnson), and Cliffe Pools, two 2CY+ males and two 2CY+ females, 16th April to 18th June (P. Larkin *et al.*).

Lincolnshire Grainthorpe, 2CY female, 4th–9th May, photo (S. Lorand, K. Sparkes *et al.*). Frampton Marsh RSPB, 2CY+ male and 2CY+ female, 27th–28th May, photo (T. Collett, I. Ellis *et al.*); also seen Cambridgeshire, Suffolk, Yorkshire.

Norfolk Methwold Hythe, 2CY+ male and 2CY+ female, 12th–28th June, photo (A. Bulgin, C. Donner, M. Smith).

Staffordshire Middleton Lakes RSPB, 2CY+ male and 2CY+ female, 18th April, photo (per Staffordshire Recorder).

Suffolk Trimley Marshes, two 2CY+, 26th April, photo (D. Langlois, E. Lucking *et al.* per Suffolk Recorder). Micklemere, Ixworth, 2CY+ male and 2CY+ female, 13th May, photo (S. Bishop, M. Wright *et al.*); also seen Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Yorkshire.

Surrey Walton Resr, 1CY, 23rd August, photo (D. M. Harris *et al.*).

Sussex Sidlesham Ferry, 2CY+ male, 13th–19th April, photo (A. House *et al.*). Sidlesham Ferry, 2CY+ female, 29th May to 7th June, photo (A. House *et al.*).

Yorkshire Potteric Carr, 2CY+ male and 2CY+ female, 29th May, photo (A. Andruchiw, S. J. Furber *et al.*); also seen Cambridgeshire, Lincolnshire, Suffolk.

2012 Cornwall Walmsley Sanctuary, 2CY+, 28th April to 4th May, photo (D. I. Julian, C. Selway *et al.* per Cornwall Recorder).

(Breeds along Atlantic coast of France & locally throughout Mediterranean basin to Black Sea. To E, breeds from S Siberia & C Asia to NW China & S to Hong Kong. Most European birds winter sub-Saharan Africa &, increasingly, in SW Iberia. Asian breeders winter S & SE Asia & S China.)

Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* (2, 86, 2) *About three per year; stable*

Lincolnshire Alkborough Flats, 2CY+, 29th January, photo (G. P. Catley, N. Drinkall).

Norfolk Breydon Water RSPB, female or 2CY male, 28th–30th June, photo (K. R. Dye, A. Stride *et al.*).

(Breeds across Siberian tundra from Yamal Peninsula E to Chukotskiy Peninsula, including New Siberian islands, & W Alaska. Winters Indian subcontinent, S China & S Japan, S through SE Asia to Australia, New Zealand & islands in C Pacific, small numbers regular Kenya & Persian Gulf.)

Hudsonian Whimbrel *Numenius hudsonicus* (0, 8, 2) *Very rare, last in 2013*

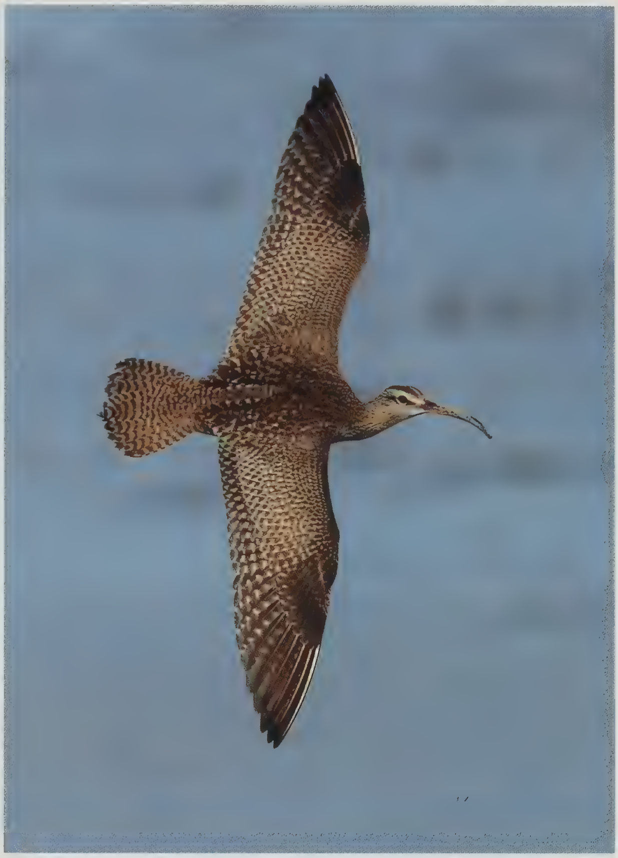
Cornwall Marazion to Perranuthnoe, 1CY, 30th October into 2016, photo (F. Duff *et al.*); also seen Isles of Scilly.

Isles of Scilly Gimble Porth, Tresco, 1CY, 15th–19th October, photo (S. J. Broyd *et al.*) (plate 313); also seen Cornwall.

Sussex Church Norton and Pagham Harbour, 3CY+, 9th June to 27th July, photo (G. Kinnard *et al.*).

The rather long bill of the Sussex bird suggested that it might be a female. However, since Hudsonian Whimbrel tends to show a longer bill than its Eurasian counterpart, and since there is apparently less sexual dimorphism in Hudsonian, our conclusion was that it was better left unsexed.

(Breeds on tundra of W & N Alaska & N Canada E to Hudson Bay. Migrates through Canada & USA to winter coastal regions of S USA, S to Chile & Brazil.)



Richard Stonier

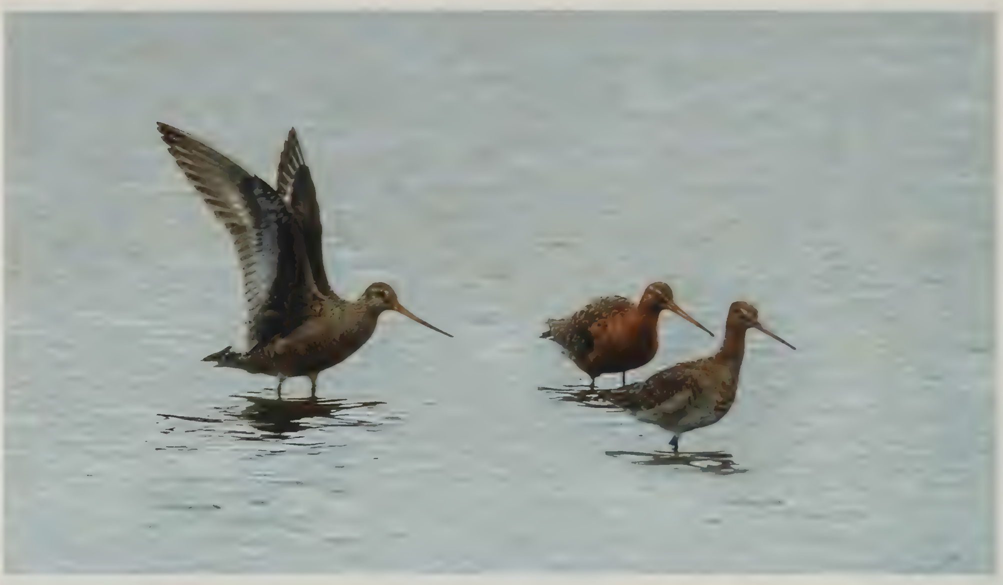
313. Juvenile (1CY) Hudsonian Whimbrel *Numenius hudsonicus*, Tresco, Scilly, October 2015.

Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica* (0, 2, 1) *Extremely rare, previous records in 1981 and 1988*

Somerset Meare Heath, 3CY+ female, 24th April to 3rd May, photo (T. Raven *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 108: plates 225, 226; plate 314).

On 24th April 2015, during an evening visit to his local patch at Meare Heath, on the Somerset Levels, Tom Raven came across a very dark godwit among a 100-strong flock of 'Icelandic Black-tailed Godwits' *Limosa limosa islandica.* Immediately, alarm bells were ringing. Surely it must be a Hudsonian Godwit! Could it be a melanistic Black-tailed Godwit, though? Frustratingly, he could not see the diagnostic black underwing-coverts before the light faded. The following morning, with the bird still present and giving better views, the identification was settled. There is often initial disbelief about the discovery of what may seem an impossibly rare bird and Tom describes this wonderfully in his Rare Bird Alert write-up: 'I can't believe it, I know what I've seen but for some reason I'm not sure!! Was it the light? All the other birds had a white underwing. What's wrong, it's a Hudwit, but I still can't believe it!' Very quickly it was all systems go and one of the ornithological highlights of 2015 was available to birders across the UK and Europe.

Only two other Hudsonian Godwits have been seen in Britain. The first for the Western Palearctic was a bird at Blacktoft Sands, Yorkshire, from 10th September 1981 until 3rd October, which was also seen across the River Trent in Lincolnshire. It was then relocated at Countess Wear, Devon, in November 1981, where it remained until mid January the following year. Amazingly, it returned to Blacktoft in spring 1983, being seen from 26th April to 6th May. The second was seen at Slains Pools, Collieston, North-east Scotland, on 26th September 1988, by just two observers. Given that 32 years had passed since the returning Yorkshire bird, the Somerset



Richard Stonier

314. Adult (3CY+) female Hudsonian Godwit *Limosa haemastica* (left), with Black-tailed Godwits *L. limosa*, Meare Heath, Somerset, May 2015.

individual was extremely popular.

On 22nd July 2015, the first for Ireland was found by Dermot Breen, at Inishdawros, Co. Galway, and subsequently relocated on Inishmore on 15th–17th September. Although initially tempting to link the sightings in Somerset and Ireland, both birds were well documented and there were clear plumage differences; the Somerset bird was an adult female, while the Galway bird was a male.

(Breeds locally Alaska, & N Canada from Mackenzie River delta to W Hudson Bay. After breeding, most birds stage in James Bay before non-stop migration flight to wintering grounds in S Chile & S Argentina.)

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Calidris falcinellus* (15, 233, 5) *About five per year; stable*

Lincolnshire Frampton Marsh RSPB, 2CY+, 9th–12th June, photo (per birding information services).

Moray & Nairn Findhorn Bay, 2CY+, 29th May (R. H. Dennis *et al.*).

Norfolk Snettisham RSPB, 2CY+, 18th–26th July, photo (N. J. Moran *et al.*).

Suffolk Tinker's Marshes, Walberswick, 2CY+, 22nd–23rd May, photo (C. A. Buttle *et al.* per Suffolk Recorder).

Yorkshire Scorton Quarry, 1CY, 26th August, photo (S. Clifton, R. Stephenson).

(Nominate race breeds N Norway, Sweden & Finland, & Arctic Russia where distribution uncertain. Migrates through E Mediterranean, Black & Caspian Seas to winter Persian Gulf & W India to Sri Lanka, with small numbers coastal E Africa. E race *sibirica* breeds from Taimyr Peninsula E to Kolyma River delta, & winters from Bay of Bengal through coastal SE Asia to Australia.)

Baird's Sandpiper *Calidris bairdii* (1, 254, 4) *About six per year; increasing*

Argyll Hough Bay and Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree, 1CY, 29th September to 2nd October, photo (J. Bowler, J. Dickson, J. Wilson).

Cornwall Camel Estuary then Walmsley Sanctuary, 2CY+, 30th August (R. Bosisto *et al.*). Walmsley Sanctuary, 1CY, 15th September (R. Bosisto, P. Roseveare).

Devon Seaton, 2CY+, 15th August, photo (P. Abbott, T. J. White *et al.*).

(Breeds extreme NE Siberia on Chukotskiy Peninsula & Wrangel Island, E across N Alaska & Arctic Canada to N Baffin Island & NW Greenland. Migrates through North American interior to winter South American Andes, from S Ecuador to Tierra del Fuego.)

Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla* (4, 32, 1) *Rare, about one every 1–2 years*

Isles of Scilly Big Pool, St Agnes, 2CY+, 16th–24th July, photo (R. J. G. Dawson *et al.*).

(Breeds C & S Alaska, E across N Canada to Labrador & Newfoundland. Winters S USA, C America, the Caribbean & South America, S to Brazil & N Chile.)

Semipalmated Sandpiper *Calidris pusilla* (0, 137, 1) *About four per year; stable or increasing*

Gloucestershire Slimbridge WWT, 1CY, 28th September to 19th November, photo (M. McGill *et al.*).

(Breeds on tundra of W Alaska, E across Arctic Canada to S Baffin Island & coastal Labrador. Has bred extreme NE Siberia. Migrates across Great Plains & E seaboard of USA to winter C America & coasts of tropical South America to Brazil & Peru.)

Wilson's Phalarope *Phalaropus tricolor* (0, 242, 3) *About 3–4 per year; decreasing*

Cornwall Par Sands, 1CY, 16th August, photo (I. McGinnes).
Essex Vange Marsh RSPB, 1CY, 20th September to 3rd October, photo (per birding information services); also seen Sussex.
Lincolnshire Frampton Marsh RSPB, 1CY, 8th September (T. Collett, E. Mackrill).
Sussex Pannel Valley, 1CY, 19th September, photo (B. E. Murray *et al.*); also seen Essex.

The three birds in 2015 continue the trend of low annual totals that has been evident since the early 1990s. Between 1979 and 1991, there were seven years with double-figure totals, but there have been none since. The three this year were typical in terms of both arrival date (around two-thirds of all records have been birds discovered between mid August and the end of September) and location. Cornwall is the top county with 25 records, followed by Norfolk on 13, Cleveland on 12, then Yorkshire and Cheshire & Wirral, both on 11. The bias towards the west coast is somewhat less obvious than for some Nearctic waders and the northeast scores particularly well (18% of all records), second only to the southwest (25%), whereas Wales can muster only 5% of all occurrences.

(Breeds interior W Canada S to California & throughout Midwest states of USA; also S Ontario. Most migrate through interior USA & winter South America from Peru S to Argentina & Chile.)

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* (0, 81, 4) *About two per year; stable or decreasing*

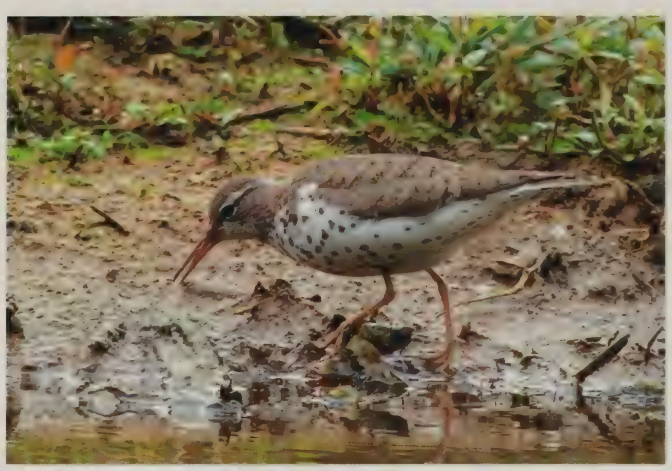
Highland Kyle of Tongue, 2CY+, 1st July, photo (A. Rhodes).
Norfolk Deepdale Marsh, Burnham Deepdale, 2CY+, 25th–29th June, photo (K. Herber, D. Hosking) (*Brit. Birds* 108: plate 316), presumed same 6th–7th July, photo (M. Andrew).
Northumberland Low Newton-by-the-Sea, 2CY+, 4th July, photo (J. G. Steele, G. Woodburn).
Sussex Pagham Harbour, 2CY+, 21st–22nd June, photo (A. Lewis *et al.*).

Analysed purely on the timing of the sightings, these records could conceivably be treated as two birds or even one single individual – but since there were no discernible plumage details that could connect them, we have kept the records separate, other than linking the two sightings at one site in Norfolk.

(European range restricted to small population in N Gulf of Bothnia, Finland, & Belarus. To E, breeds widely throughout N Russia to E Siberia. Winters along coasts of S & E Africa to Persian Gulf, Indian subcontinent, SE Asia & Australasia.)

Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius* (1, 193, 9) *About 4–5 per year; stable or increasing*

Clyde Islands Lamlash, Arran, 2CY+, 19th–21st May, photo (C. Cowley, T. Southall *et al.*).
Co. Durham South Shields, 2CY+, 5th June, photo (M. Robson).
Devon Teign Estuary, 2CY+, 17th August, photo (W. Salmon *et al.*).


Jeff Lack

315. Adult (2CY+) Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*, Coate Water, Wiltshire, August 2015.

Dorset Chard Junction GP, 1CY, 24th October into 2016, photo (R. Harris, D. W. Helliar *et al.*); also seen Somerset.

Herefordshire Wellington GP, 2CY+, 24th–25th May, photo (P. H. Downes *et al.* per Herefordshire Recorder).

Isles of Scilly Stinking Porth, Bryher, 1CY, 21st September, photo (S. J. Dodgson, J. K. Higginson). Great Pool, Tresco, 1CY, 21st October, photo (M. A. Nash *et al.*).

North-east Scotland Inverallochy, 1CY, 12th October 2014 to 19th January, photo (see also *Brit. Birds* 108: 587).

Somerset Chard Junction GP, 1CY, 24th October to 29th November (D. W. Helliar); also seen Dorset.

Warwickshire Draycote Water, 1CY, 8th–22nd October, photo (R. Hazell).

Wiltshire Coate Water, 2CY+, 15th–28th August, photo (N. P. Adams, B. Waller *et al.*) (plate 315).

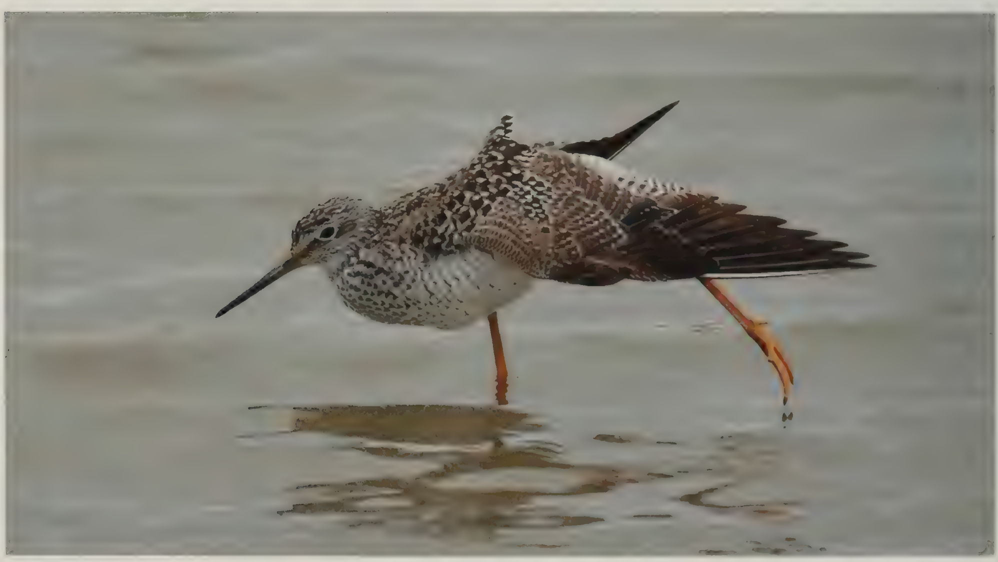
(Breeds North America from W Alaska to Newfoundland & S to California, Texas & North Carolina. Some winter coastal USA to S of breeding range but most winter C America, Caribbean & N South America, S to N Argentina & Chile.)

Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca* (6, 26, 1) *Rare, about one every two years*

Hampshire Titchfield Haven, 2CY+, 11th January, photo (D. Houghton, M. Rolfe *et al.*), presumed same 11th April to 24th July, photo (C. Bollen *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 108: plate 245; plate 316); also seen Isle of Wight.

Isle of Wight River Medina, Whippingham, 2CY+, 23rd September into 2016, photo (D. Hale *et al.*); also seen Hampshire.

As for Terek Sandpiper, this is another 'how many were there?' problem. This time there was a near unanimous agreement that the two Hampshire sightings involved the same bird, despite a


Steve Gantlett

316. Adult (2CY+) Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*, Titchfield Haven, Hampshire, June 2015.

three-month gap, before it appeared 'across the water' on the Isle of Wight, this time after a two-month gap. 'Where was it in between?' is always the question asked.

(Breeds from S Alaska across subarctic Canada E to Labrador & Newfoundland. Migrates throughout USA to winter coastal S USA, C America, Caribbean & South America.)

Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* (19, 339, 4) *About seven per year; stable or increasing*

Argyll Cornaigmore and Barrapol, Tiree, 2CY+, 21st–24th October, photo (J. Bowler *et al.*).
Lancashire & North Merseyside Brockholes, Preston, 2CY+, 20th August, photo (W. C. Aspin, T. Darbyshire), presumed same Conder Green, 23rd–26th August, photo (I. R., M. & W. W. Hartley *et al.*).
Lothian Cowton Rocks, 2CY, 1st–4th January, photo (J. Hamilton *et al.*).
Norfolk Breydon Water RSPB, 1CY+, 29th October into 2016 (P. R. Allard *et al.*).
Northumberland Newton Flash, Low Newton-by-the-Sea, 2CY+, 11th–13th May, photo (T. R. Dean *et al.*), presumed same as Northumberland 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 587–588).
Sussex Pett Level and Rye Harbour, 1CY, 25th December 2014 to 21st February, photo (see also *Brit. Birds* 108: 587–588).
2012 Cornwall Kingsmill, Tamar Estuary, 1CY, 2nd–28th September, photo (M. Beer, D. Clegg *et al.* per Cornwall Recorder), presumed same as Devon 2012 (*Brit. Birds* 106: 595–596).

(Breeds throughout much of subarctic Alaska & Canada, E to James Bay. Migrates through USA, where some overwinter, but majority winter from Caribbean & C America to Chile & Argentina.)

Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* (6, 238, 4) *About five per year; stable*

Hampshire Pennington Marshes and Keyhaven Marshes, 1CY, 23rd September into 2016, photo (M. Moody *et al.*).
Northumberland Cresswell Pond and nearby areas, 1CY, 9th November into 2016, photo (A. D. McLevy *et al.*).
Pembrokeshire Skokholm, 1CY, 20th–24th September, photo (R. Brown *et al.*).
Shetland Burravoe, Yell, 1CY, 8th–13th September, photo (P. Cosgrove *et al.*) (plate 317).

(Breeds Arctic Siberia W to Lena River delta, & coastal tundra of W & N Alaska, E to Mackenzie River, Canada. Migrates through USA to winter coastal S USA to N/C America.)

Roger Riddington

317. Juvenile (1CY) Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus*, Burravoe, Yell, Shetland, September 2015.

Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincola* (20, 73, 1) *Rare, about one per year; stable*

Suffolk Lakenheath Fen RSPB, 2CY+, 7th–11th June, photo (D. Bradnum *et al.*).

The single record in 2015 was typical in terms of both location and date. This becomes the fifth for Suffolk, placing that county on par with Norfolk, Dorset and Lancashire & N Merseyside. Yorkshire is the number one county with 11 records, followed by Kent and Cornwall with seven each. Nearly two-thirds of all arrivals have been in May or June.

(Breeds locally throughout Mediterranean basin from N Africa & S Iberia to Black Sea, most in S Spain, Portugal & Greece. To E, breeds SW Asia to Pakistan & Kazakhstan but distribution highly fragmented. Winters sub-Saharan Africa. Another race resident Africa.)

Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni* (2, 36, 1) *Rare, about one every 1–2 years*

Cleveland Seaton Carew Golf Course, 2CY+, 26th May, photo (P. Burn *et al.*); also seen North-east Scotland, Northumberland.

North-east Scotland Loch of Skene, 2CY+, 3rd June, photo (H. A. Addlesee *et al.*); also seen Cleveland, Northumberland.

Northumberland Bothal Pond, 2CY+, 29th May to 1st June, photo (D. & R. Dack *et al.*) (plate 318); also seen Cleveland, North-east Scotland.

(European breeders confined to N Black Sea in Romania & Ukraine where rare & declining. To E, more numerous across steppes of S Russia to E Kazakhstan. Winters NE Namibia & Botswana, S to N Cape & E to W Natal, South Africa, & W Swaziland. Some apparently regularly winter Ethiopia.)

Frank Golding

318. Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*, Bothal Pond, Northumberland, May 2015.

Brünnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia* (1, 43, 0) *Rare, about one every 1–2 years*

2013 Dorset Portland Harbour, 1CY+, 19th–31st December, photo (C. E. Richards, D. & P. Saunders *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 107: 604); note revised dates and observers.

(Breeds Greenland, Iceland, Svalbard, NE Norway & Novaya Zemlya. Outside Europe, breeds on islands off N Siberia into Bering Sea, S to Kuril, Komandorskiye, Aleutian & Pribilof Islands. Also W Alaska & N Canada from Baffin Island to Hudson Bay, Labrador coast & W Greenland. Winters among open leads in pack ice or at sea from Barents Sea S to N Norway, S Greenland, & along Labrador coast S to NE coastal USA. Other populations winter N Pacific, S to N Japan.)

Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* (1, 24, 0) *Rare, about one every two years*

2014 Cornwall Pendeen Watch, 2CY+, 21st October (M. Darlaston, D. S. Flumm, W. Macdonald, M. Twiggs).

(Tropical seas. West Indies & Atlantic population breeds Banc d'Arguin, Mauritania, Pagalu, Gulf of Guinea & widely throughout Caribbean S to offshore N Venezuela. Other populations breed from Red Sea & Arabian Gulf locally through Indian Ocean to SE China, Philippines, & N Australia. Northern populations migratory, wintering at sea to S of breeding areas.)

Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* (51, 299, 7) *About 3–4 per year; stable or decreasing*

Ceredigion Ynys-hir RSPB, 3CY+, 2nd July (R. Jones *et al.*); also seen Cheshire & Wirral.

Cheshire & Wirral Burton Mere Wetlands RSPB, 3CY+, 3rd July, photo (per birding information services); also seen Ceredigion.

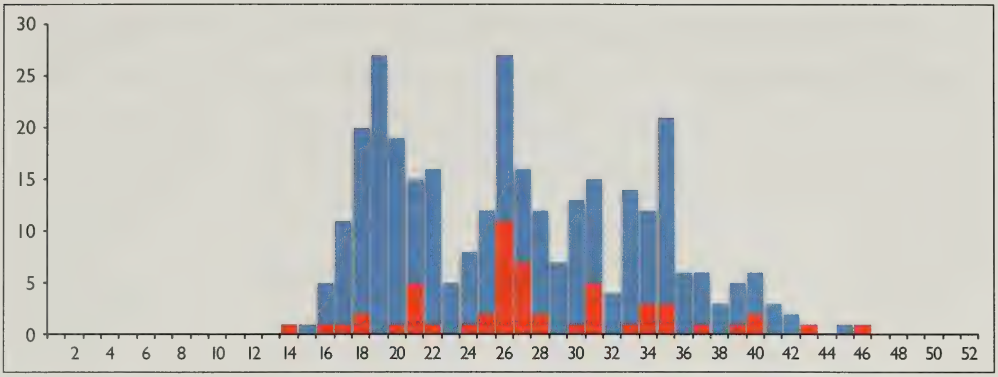
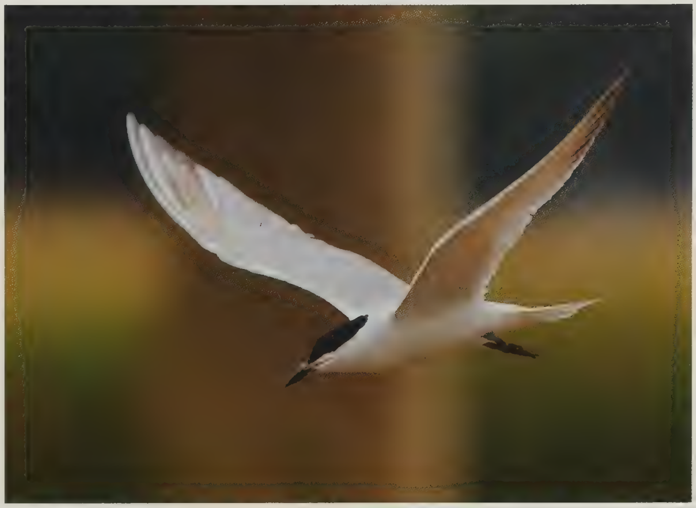


Fig. 2. Weekly discovery dates of Gull-billed Terns *Gelochelidon nilotica* in Britain, 1950–2015; birds staying more than one day shown in red.

Cornwall Porth Resr, Newquay, 3CY+, 14th April (R. Bosisto, P. Roseveare, J. Villiers), presumed same Walmsley Sanctuary, Wadebridge, 17th–19th April, photo (R. Bosisto, P. Roseveare). Hayle Estuary, 3CY+, 1st July, photo (T. McGowan *et al.*).
Devon Bowling Green Marsh RSPB and Exminster Marshes RSPB, 3CY+, 23rd May, photo (per birding information services). Kingsteignton, 3CY+, 12th–18th July, photo (W. Salmon *et al.*) (plate 319).
Northumberland Bothal Pond, 3CY+, 29th–30th May, photo (M. Eaton, I. Fisher, N. Foggo *et al.*); also seen Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire.
Nottinghamshire Lound GP, 3CY+, 11th June, photo (G. Hobson *et al.* per Nottinghamshire Recorder); also seen Northumberland, Yorkshire.
Orkney Birsay, Mainland, 3CY+, 20th June (A. Forsyth).
Yorkshire Old Moor RSPB, 3CY+, 16th June, photo (J. Hewitt, D. M. Waddington *et al.*); also seen Northumberland, Nottinghamshire.
2014 Ceredigion Ynyslas, 3CY+, 12th May (B. Sheils); also seen Meirionnydd.
2014 Meirionnydd Aberdyfi, 3CY+, 11th–12th May (G. Griffiths); also seen Ceredigion.

Determining how records should be grouped together as relating to the same – or at least ‘presumed same’ – individual is a recurring dilemma, and one that may have a significant impact on our statistics. Especially for species with rather uniform plumage, unwritten and somewhat esoteric indicators such as a suggestive coincidence of dates, locations and perceived likelihood of relocation are subconsciously assimilated to arrive at what seems the most likely scenario. However, the characteristic inner primary moult of terns in late winter varies within as well as between species, and can serve as a useful tool in grouping records more objectively, at least for records which are accompanied by photographs, particularly those of birds in flight. In North America at least, mature Gull-billed Terns typically moult one to four inner primaries in their


Mike Trew

319. Adult (3CY+) Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*, Kingsteignton, Devon, July 2015.

'prebreeding' moult (Howell 2010). Applying this to the records in Britain in 2015, the bird in Ceredigion/Cheshire & Wirral had replaced three primaries in its prebreeding moult (P1–P3), whereas the bird(s) in Northumberland, Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire had replaced just two (P1–P2). The bird in Devon (plate 319) in July showed three generations of primaries, presumably due to a more extensive prebreeding moult (P1–P6) being followed by an additional ('presupplemental') moult of P1–P2: this suggests a non-breeder, most likely a subadult (Howell 2010).

Since 1950, Gull-billed Tern has shown a tri-modal pattern of arrival in Britain: spring migrants in late April and May; apparently non-breeding birds in late June and early July; and autumn migrants, with peak numbers in late August and early September (fig. 2). Spring and autumn sightings are most likely to be of birds staying for just one day, whereas summer arrivals are more likely to linger, most notably one in Gower between 6th July and 14th September 1996 (although it visited Ireland during that period!).

The northwest European population of Gull-billed Tern is currently classified as Endangered. The last remaining breeding site is in northern Germany, at the mouth of the River Elbe, where around 30–40 pairs breed, within a Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* colony. Since 2011, the colony has been subject to increased conservation measures, including the use of incubators to protect eggs and young over spring tides (Conradt & Ebels 2014).

(In Europe, small population breeds N Germany. Widespread though local Spain, elsewhere colonies small & isolated. To E, breeds discontinuously from Turkey & SW Russia through Kazakhstan, Mongolia & NW China, with isolated population NE China. European population winters coastal W Africa, S to Gulf of Guinea. Asian populations winter Persian Gulf to Indian subcontinent & SE Asia. Other races occur Australia & the Americas.)

Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* (23, 281, 2) *About five per year, influx 1988 (18); decreasing*

Essex Holland Haven, 3CY+, 1st August, photo (M. Rodwell *et al.* per P. Davis).
Lincolnshire Gibraltar Point, 3CY+, 30th May (R. Doan, K. M. Wilson *et al.*).

A Caspian Tern found dead at Whitby, Yorkshire, in August 1939 had been ringed as a chick in the USA, on Shoe Island, Lake Michigan, on 14th July 1927 (*Brit. Birds* 34: 184). Notwithstanding that amazing record, the strong easterly bias in the distribution of British Caspian Terns suggests that most of our birds originate from the small Baltic population. That population increased to a peak of about 2,500 pairs in 1971 but has since declined to around 1,700 pairs. Yet numbers in Britain peaked at 18 in 1988, around the same time that the European population was at its lowest ebb. There has been a steady decline since then (fig. 3) despite a rise in other populations throughout the 1990s, to about 800 breeding pairs in the Black Sea region and to 2,000 breeding pairs in the Caspian Sea.

Several reasons have been given for the decline in the Baltic population, among them predation of eggs and chicks. Herring Gulls *Larus argentatus* and White-tailed Eagles *Haliaeetus albicilla* have recently devastated some colonies in Sweden. Perhaps linked to the low breeding success in this population, very few young birds have been recorded in Britain. Of the 45 birds for which an age was attributed, two were described as 'immature' (4%), one juvenile (2%), one first-summer (2%), three second-summer (7%) and 38 adult (84%). First-summer birds rarely return north of the

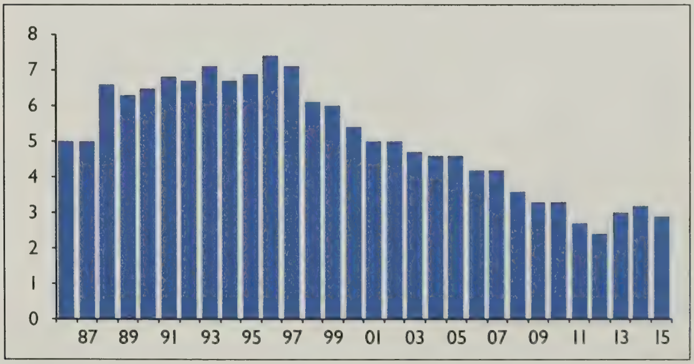


Fig. 3. Rolling ten-year means of Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* records in Britain – hence the value of 2.9 for 2015 is the mean for the ten-year period 2006–15 inclusive. This shows the general decline in the numbers reaching Britain over the past 30 years.

Mediterranean and would thus be exceptional here; thereafter, the proportion of birds returning north increases with age. Third- and fourth-summer birds are very similar in appearance to adults, however, and not all of the birds aged as 'adults' may be sufficiently mature to breed; only rarely do Caspian Terns first breed in their third summer, most do so when four or five years old.

(European population breeds Baltic coasts of Estonia, Sweden & Finland to head of Gulf of Bothnia. To E, fragmented populations from Black Sea coast of Ukraine across steppe-lake region of C Asia to NW Mongolia & E China. European birds winter W Africa to Gulf of Guinea, Asian birds winter on coasts to S of breeding range. Other populations occur Australia, S Africa & North America.)

Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* (23, 189, 1) *About 4–5 per year, influx 2009 (25); increasing*

Yorkshire Spurn, 3CY+, 4th August (R. Swales *et al.*).
2005 **Warwickshire** Alvecote Pools, 27th June, previously accepted but now considered not proven following a review (*Brit. Birds* 100: 720).

Just a single bird is disappointing for a species that appeared in record numbers only a few years ago, with 12 in 2008 and 25 the following year. The fact that it was in early autumn is also quite unusual; this species is generally regarded as a classic spring overshoot, and the bulk of past records are from April and May. Spring birds are generally straightforward for the Committee to assess. Birds in adult plumage account for 80% of records; those in juvenile and first-winter plumage are correspondingly less familiar, which may make identification more challenging.

There is a marked southerly bias to the British records (19% in the southeast, 18% in the southwest) but inland counties are also well represented and the Midlands provides another 16% of the total. There are just eight records from Scotland, including three in North-east Scotland (most recently Loch of Strathbeg, 5th–9th June 2008) and two more in the Outer Hebrides. A first appearance for Orkney or Shetland is surely overdue, however.

(Breeds in small, scattered colonies through S & E Europe from Iberia to Poland. Numerous & widespread from N Black Sea E to W Kazakhstan, with Volga/Ural River complex holding most of European population. Winters tropical W & C Africa & from Nile delta to E Africa. Other populations occur Indian subcontinent, E Asia, S Africa & Australia.)

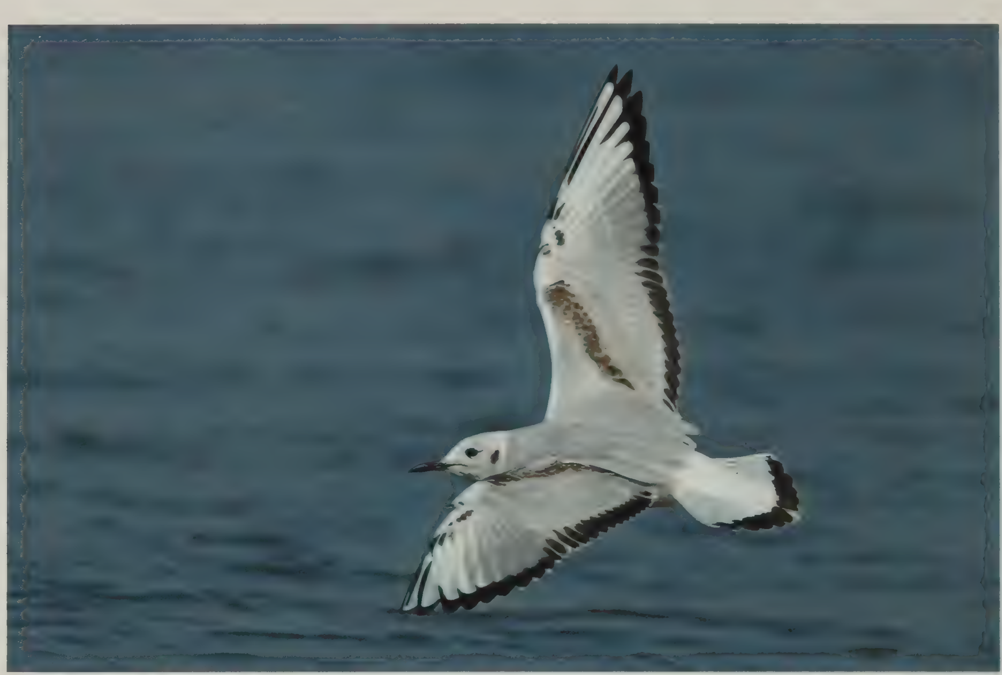
Ivory Gull *Pagophila eburnea* (75, 65, 0) *About 1–2 per year; stable*

Highland Uig Bay, Skye, 1CY, 23rd December 2014 to 4th January, photo (*Brit. Birds* 108: 591); presumed same Ardmair and Ullapool, 13th–22nd January, photo (per birding information services).

(In Europe, breeds Svalbard. Elsewhere, restricted to islands in the high Arctic between Franz Josef Land & Arctic Canada, with small numbers N & SE Greenland. Wintering range poorly known, but apparently within or close to edge of pack ice.)

Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia* (8, 211, 10) *About seven per year; increasing*

Argyll Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree, 2CY, 24th March, photo (J. Bowler). Ormsary, 4CY+, 26th March to 6th April, photo (J. Nadin, M. J. Wood *et al.*), presumed same as Ormsary, Argyll 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 592–593).
Caithness Thurso, 5CY+, 3rd March, photo (E. MacDonald, J. J. Sweeney), presumed same as Caithness 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 592–593).
Carmarthenshire Penclacwydd WWT, 3CY+, 3rd February, photo (L. Allnatt).
Devon Teignmouth and Teign Estuary, Dawlish Warren and Exmouth, 4CY+, 23rd August into 2016, photo (L. Allnatt, M. Bailey *et al.*); presumed same as one of Devon 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 592–593).
Dorset Chesil Cove, Portland and nearby areas, 2CY, 7th March, photo (C. E. Richards *et al.*), presumed same Radipole Lake RSPB and Lodmoor RSPB, 17th March to 7th April, photo (per Dorset Recorder) (plate 320).
East Glamorgan Cardiff Heliport, River Taff and Cardiff Bay, 9CY, 1st February to 12th April,



Gary Thoburn

320. First-winter (2CY) Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*, Radipole Lake, Dorset, April 2015.

photo (A. Bevan, P. Howlett, G. N. Smith *et al.*), presumed same as Cardiff Bay and Cosmeston Lakes, East Glamorgan 2014. Cardiff Bay, 5CY+, 24th–28th March, photo, (P. Howlett *et al.*), presumed same as Cardiff Bay and Ogmore Estuary, East Glamorgan 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 592–593).

Gower Llanrhidian, Burry Inlet, 3CY+, 12th May, photo (J. N. Edwards, M. Piercey, B. Stewart).

Hampshire Weston Shore, 2CY, 3rd–22nd May, photo (A. R. Collins *et al.*).

Kent Dungeness, 3CY+, 16th May, photo (S. W. Gale). Oare Marshes, 4CY, 20th June to 12th August, photo (M. E. Wright *et al.* per Kent Recorder), presumed same as Kent 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 592–593).

Moray & Nairn Lossie Estuary, 2CY+, 4th–15th October, photo (D. A. Gibson *et al.*).

Northumberland Farne Islands, 3CY+, 23rd–29th November (D. Roche *et al.*), presumed same as Northumberland 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 592–593).

Orkney Peerie Sea, Kirkwall, Mainland, 2CY+, 9th–20th December, photo (K. E. Hague *et al.*).

Outer Hebrides Hirta, St Kilda, 2CY, 11th–21st June, photo (S. Dalrymple, J. Ibbotson, G. Prior, P. Stronach).

Shetland Skaw, Unst, 3CY+, 11th June, photo (D. Morton, M. & R. Ridley).

(Breeds widely across N North America from W & C Alaska through Canada to James Bay. Winters locally on ice-free rivers & lakes in N USA, & S along both coasts of USA to Mexico & Caribbean.)

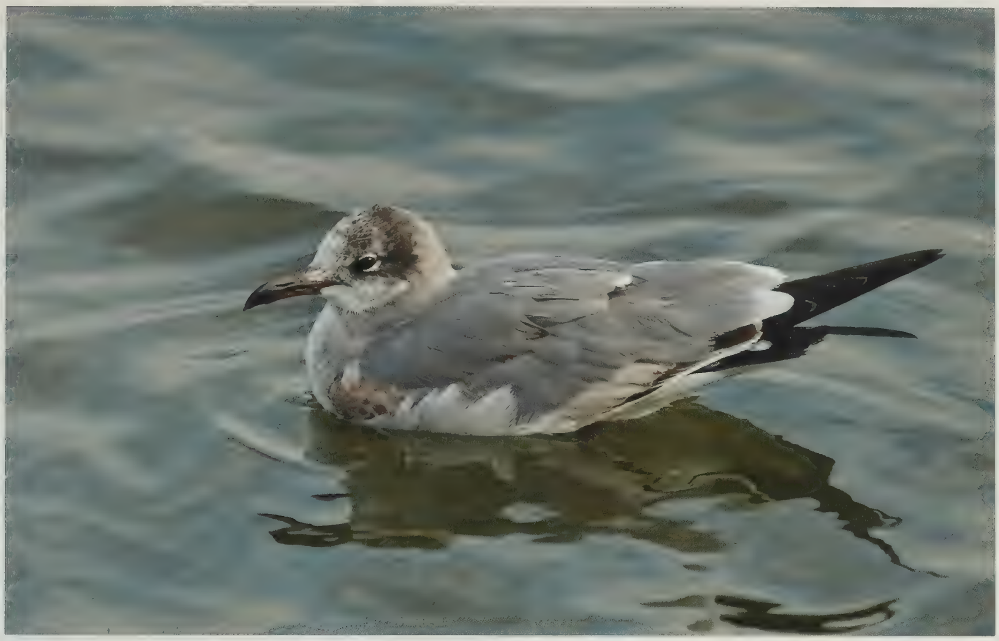
Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla* (1, 196, 3) *About five per year, influxes 2005 (58), 2006 (22); stable*

Argyll Portnahaven, Islay, 3CY+, 21st July, photo (J. S. Armitage, I. Turner).

Cheshire & Wirral New Brighton, 2CY, 3rd February to 20th April, photo (M. Brown *et al.* per Cheshire & Wirral Recorder) (*Brit. Birds* 108: plate 112; plate 321); also seen Lancashire & North Merseyside.

Lancashire & North Merseyside Seaforth, 2CY, 5th–16th April, photo (A. J. Conway *et al.* per Lancashire & North Merseyside Recorder); also seen Cheshire & Wirral.

Norfolk Salthouse, Cley and Blakeney Point, 3CY+, 14th June, photo (N. E. G. Elms, A. Kettle *et al.*); also seen Yorkshire.


Steve Young

321. First-winter (2CY) Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*, New Brighton, Cheshire & Wirral, February 2015.

Yorkshire Spurn, 3CY+, 13th June, photo (J. M. Turton *et al.*); also seen Norfolk.

Following the influxes of 2005 and 2006, Laughing Gull has reverted to its former status as a true rarity, and in fact there were blank years in 2008 and 2010. As might be expected there is a southwest bias to past records (accounting for almost a third of the total) but it has also been recorded from several inland counties and should always be on the radar of any gravel-pit or reservoir watcher. It may be encountered in almost any month of the year, although the 2005 influx was primarily in November, while there is also a distinct peak in late spring and early summer. Laughing Gulls can linger for quite some time, as the 2015 bird in the northwest demonstrates, although it was still some way short of the famous returning Co. Durham/Northumberland individual, first seen in January 1984 and making its final appearance in March 1987.

(Breeds along E seaboard of USA from Nova Scotia, Canada, S to Florida & Gulf coast, the Caribbean, & C America to N Venezuela. Southern populations largely resident but N breeders winter within southern breeding range.)

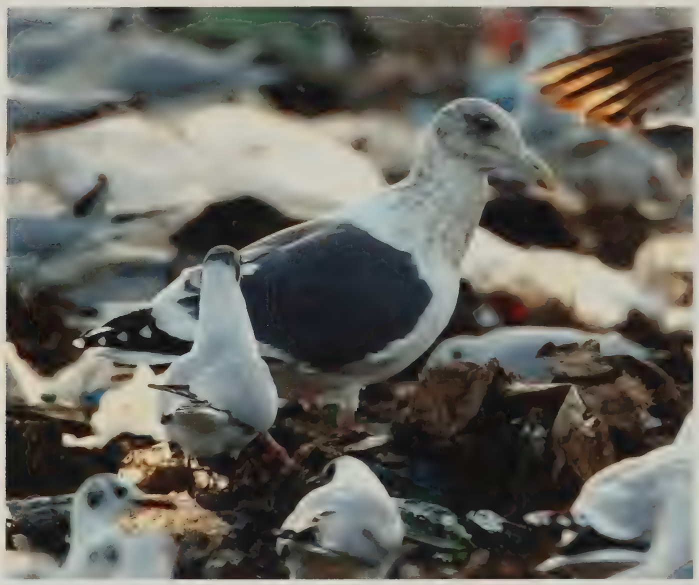
Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus* (0, 1, 0) *Extremely rare, one record in 2011*

2011 Essex Pitsea Landfill, 5CY+, 3rd and 19th February, photo (S. Arlow, S. Buckell) (*Brit. Birds* 105: plate 260; plate 322), presumed same Hanningfield Resr, 6th February, photo (D. Acfield *et al.*); also seen Greater London.

2011 Greater London Rainham Landfill, 5CY+, 13th–14th January, photo (D. Mitchell *et al.*), presumed same 16th–17th and 20th–26th February, photo (R. Stokes *et al.* per birding information services); also seen Essex.

Once no more than a somewhat fanciful prediction, it is now apparent that Slaty-backed Gull occurs in Europe with some regularity. Prior to this British first, in 2011, the first Western Palearctic record was identified in Lithuania on 17th–20th November 2008 before being relocated in Latvia on 13th–21st April 2009. Then followed individuals in Finland on 3rd–4th November 2012, Belarus from 26th December 2012 until 4th January 2013, and in Iceland on 14th May 2012. More recently, two more have been found in Ireland (at Waterside, Co. Galway, on 8th February 2014, and Killybegs, Co. Donegal, on 17th–18th January 2015). All seven have been adult (or near-adult) birds, which is particularly intriguing since it raises the question of whether younger birds are being overlooked. Perhaps there are underlying demographic factors that count against vagrancy in immature birds –

after all, of the half-a-dozen or more Glaucous-winged Gulls *L. glaucescens* identified in Europe, all have been in adult or subadult plumage too. But at least the identification of these two large Pacific gulls is relatively straightforward, which is something that cannot easily be said of the third member of the trio, Vega Gull *L. smithsonianus vegae.* Following an adult in Ireland in January 2016, that taxon is now proven to reach Europe as well, but in what numbers? Breeding to the west in northern Siberia, it may be a far more frequent visitor to northern Europe than either Slaty-backed or Glaucous-winged Gull, but will the challenge of picking them out continue to be roundly dismissed, just as it had been prior to the Irish revelation?


Steve Arlow

322. Adult (5CY+) Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*, Pitsea Landfill, Essex, February 2011.

(Breeds coastal NE Russia from N Kamchatka S to Sakhalin, & E Hokkaido, Japan. Winters from S Sakhalin & E Hokkaido, & coastal China S to Hong Kong.)

Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis*
Atlantic Islands race, 'Azorean Yellow-legged Gull' *L. m. atlantis* (0, 2, 0)

Extremely rare

Lincolnshire Marston, 10CY+, 26th October, photo (D. Roberts, B. Ward), presumed same as Cambridgeshire 2014, see below; also seen Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire.

Northamptonshire Stanwick GP, 10CY+, 10th October, photo (per birding information services), presumed same as Cambridgeshire 2014, see below; also seen Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire.

Nottinghamshire Kilvington Lakes, 10CY+, 29th October to 2nd November, photo (D. Nicholson, C. Scott), presumed same as Cambridgeshire 2014, see below; also seen Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire.

2014 Cambridgeshire Grafham Water, 9CY+, 29th October to 2nd November, photo (A. D. W. Tongue *et al.*), presumed same as Leicestershire & Rutland 2013, see below; also seen Northamptonshire.

2014 Northamptonshire Stanwick GP, 9CY+, 21st October, photo (M. R. Alibone, S. P. Fisher, R. D. Webster); also seen Cambridgeshire.

2013 Leicestershire & Rutland Rutland Water, 8CY+, 20th September to 19th October, photo (R. G. Bayldon, M. G. Berriman, S. M. Lister *et al.*), presumed same as Leicestershire & Rutland 2012, see below; also seen Northamptonshire.

2013 Northamptonshire Stanwick GP, 8CY+, 27th September intermittently to 6th November, photo (M. T. Elliott per Northamptonshire Recorder); also seen Leicestershire & Rutland.

2012 Leicestershire & Rutland Rutland Water, 7CY+, 12th October to 3rd November, photo (S. M. Lister, J. Wright *et al.*) (fig. 4), presumed same as Leicestershire & Rutland 2011, see below.

2011 Bedfordshire Stewartby Lake, 6CY+, 21st–26th September, photo (S. C. Blain, M. J. Palmer *et al.*), presumed same as Gloucestershire 2010, see below; also seen Cambridgeshire, Leicestershire & Rutland.

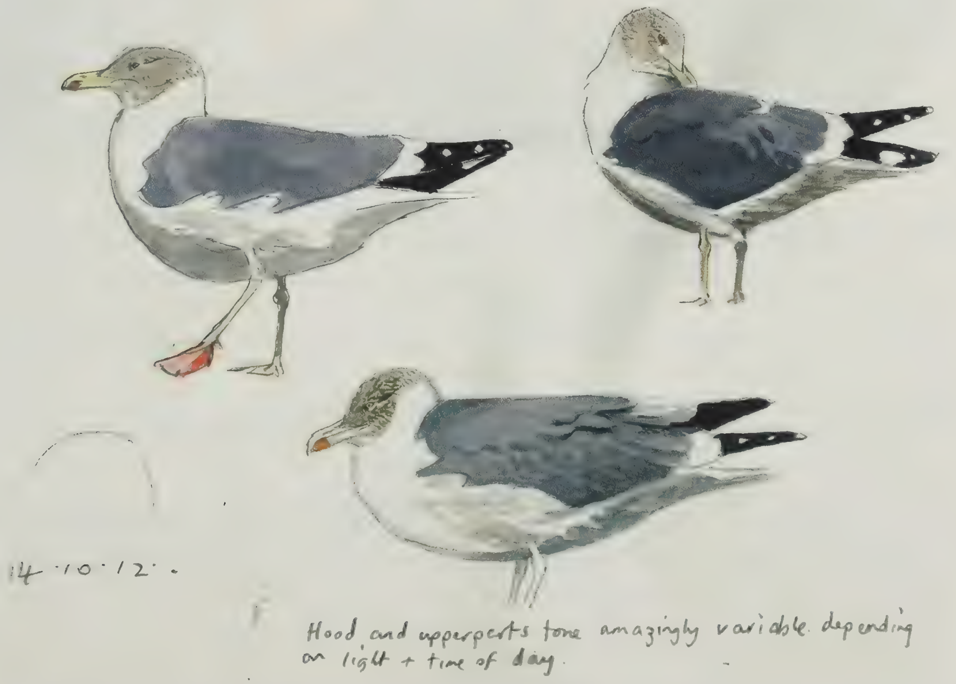
2011 Cambridgeshire Grafham Water, 6CY+, 4th–6th October, photo (per Cambridgeshire Recorder), presumed same as Gloucestershire 2010, see below; also seen Bedfordshire,

Leicestershire & Rutland.
2011 Leicestershire & Rutland Rutland Water, 6CY+, 19th October to 6th November, photo (M. G. Berriman, A. H. J. Harrop, S. M. Lister *et al.*), presumed same Eyebrook Resr, 24th–26th October, photo (M. Ketley *et al.*); presumed same as Gloucestershire 2010, see below; also seen Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire.
2010 Gloucestershire Stoke Orchard and Bishop's Cleeve Landfill, Cheltenham, 5CY+, 7th September to 14th October, photo (J. D. Sanders), presumed same Hempsted Landfill, Gloucester, 18th October (J. D. Sanders); presumed same as Oxfordshire 2009, see below.
2009 Oxfordshire Didcot, 4CY+, 5th October to 26th December, photo (I. Lewington *et al.*).
2008 Cornwall Sennen and nearby areas, 2CY, 28th July to 11th November, photo (M. T. Elliott *et al.* per birding information services).

Widely regarded as a distinctive taxon, Azorean Yellow-legged Gull occupies a restricted breeding range and is undoubtedly a rare vagrant to Britain. Yet it does show a relatively predictable dispersal pattern away from its breeding grounds, with individuals reaching North America annually and Ireland boasting about 15 records to date. The identification of the bird in Cornwall in 2008 was discussed at length by its finder (Elliott 2008), and his superb photographs portray just how distinctive (even demonic) an immature can look. Adult birds are also identifiable, especially when sporting their hood of dense dark streaks, but care must be taken to eliminate the various hybrid or intergrade combinations that could cause confusion.

A year after the Cornish bird, which was present to November 2008, another individual was discovered in Oxfordshire, and it has been assumed that all subsequent sightings relate to that second individual wandering around the Midlands and present at least until the end of 2015. We are aware of other possible records of this bird; descriptions and/or photographs would be gratefully received. BBRC also accepted a record from the Outer Hebrides in 2005 (an adult at Craigston, Barra, on 10th September), although this was not accepted as a first for Britain by BOURC (and thus does not form part of our statistics).

(Breeds Azores, Madeira & Canary Islands. Sedentary or dispersive, possibly regular W African coast.)


14·10·12·
Hood and upperparts tone amazingly variable depending on light + time of day.

John Wright

Fig. 4. Adult (7CY+) 'Azorean Yellow-legged Gull' *Larus michahellis atlantis*, Rutland Water, Leicestershire & Rutland, October 2012.

American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus* (0, 29, 1) *Rare, about one per year; stable or increasing*

Outer Hebrides Hirta, St Kilda, 2CY, 11th–15th June, found dead 15th June, photo (S. Dalrymple, J. Ibbotson, P. Stronach).

(Breeds S Alaska E across C & N Canada to S Baffin Island, Labrador, Newfoundland & NE coastal region of USA. Many resident, others winter S to S USA & Mexico. Other races breed Mongolia to C Siberia, & NE Siberia.)

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* (2, 9, 1) *Very rare, last in 2011 (two)*

Shetland Scalloway, Mainland, 1CY *S. o. meena*, 22nd November to 17th December, photo (G. & S. Smith, E. & J. Watt *et al.*) (*Brit Birds* 109: plates 30, 323).

(Breeds from S Urals, E to Japan & S to Tien Shan & Himalayas, C China & Taiwan. Northern populations migratory, wintering SE Iran, Indian subcontinent, & from S China to N Thailand & Indochina.)

Jim Watt

323. First-winter (1CY) Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*, Scalloway, Shetland, November 2015.

Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura* (0, 4, 1) *Very rare, last in 2007, 2013*

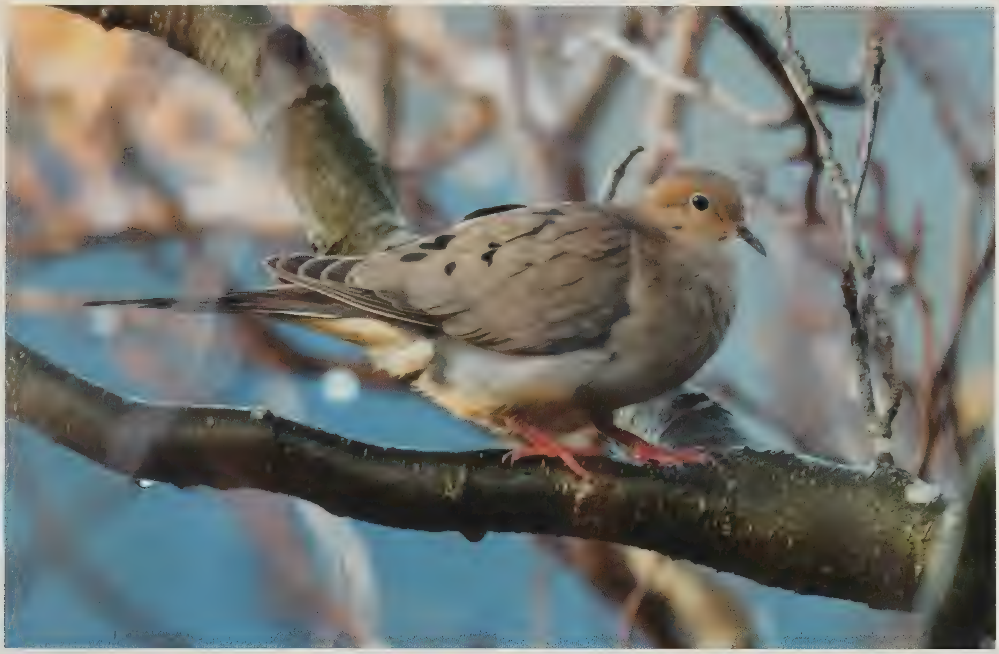
Shetland Lerwick, Mainland, 1CY, 26th December into 2016, photo (A. Taylor *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 109: plates 94, 324).

(Breeds SE Alaska & S Canada from British Columbia to Nova Scotia, S throughout USA to Panama & West Indies. Some northern populations remain S Canada while others winter S to Panama.)

Great Spotted Cuckoo *Clamator glandarius* (3, 46, 1) *Rare, about one per year; stable*

East Glamorgan Cwm Cadlan, Penderyn, 2CY, 15th–17th April, photo (M. Bevan *et al.*).
The first record for East Glamorgan and the fifth for Wales. This remains a very rare bird in Britain and is a splendid find. The Cwm Cadlan bird appeared on a typical date: April alone accounts for 32% of all previous records, just ahead of March on 26%. Cornwall is, unsurprisingly, the top British county, with nine individuals, followed by Norfolk on seven and Kent on five. Devon, Scilly and Sussex come next, reinforcing the south/southwest distribution pattern.

(Breeds Spain, Portugal, S France & E to Greece. W Asian population uncommon, breeding discontinuously from C Turkey, Cyprus, Israel & Jordan to N Iraq & SW Iran. Palearctic breeders winter sub-Saharan Africa but range uncertain owing to presence of African populations.)


Austin Taylor

324. First-winter (1CY) Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*, Lerwick, Shetland, December 2015.

Barn Owl *Tyto alba*

Central European race, 'Dark-breasted Barn Owl' *T. a. guttata* (0, [11], 0) *Uncertain*

2014 Cheshire & Wirral Brimstage, 3CY+ female, 21st May to 2nd July at least, trapped, photo (S. Binney *et al.*).

(Race *guttata* mostly resident to N & E of nominate race, from Netherlands & Denmark, E to W Russia & S to Bulgaria, largely E of the 3°C January isotherm. Intergrades with nominate race are frequent towards W & S limits of its range.)

Snowy Owl *Bubo scandiacus* (196, 217, 2) *About three per year; stable*

Highland Forsinard, 2CY+ male, 12th–14th February, photo (S. Watson *et al.*). Strathy Valley, 3CY+ male, 13th May, photo (J. B. Bell *et al.*).

2014 Caithness Camster, 2CY+ male, 15th–26th October, photo (J. Smith *et al.*).

2014 Essex East Tilbury, 2CY+, 24th March (P. Larkin).

2014 Highland Inchnadamph Forest, 1CY+ male, 20th September, photo (E. Hafiz, R. Wilby).

2014 North-east Scotland Ben Macdui, Cairngorms, 4CY+ male, 31st May to 26th June, photo (per North-east Scotland Recorder), presumed same as Moray & Nairn 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 596–597).

(Breeds N Scandinavia & Iceland, depending on availability of small mammals. Outside Europe, erratic circumpolar breeder across tundra & N islands of Arctic Russia, Siberia, Alaska, Canada & N Greenland. Most disperse S in winter but some resident or nomadic if food available.)

Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* (0, 92, 2) *About three per year; recent increase*

Northumberland Newbiggin-by-the-Sea, 1CY+, 31st October, photo (T. R. Cleeves, A. G. Pitches), presumed same Tynemouth, 1st November, photo (A. Curry, M. Kerby, D. Watson *et al.*).

Yorkshire Flamborough Head, 1CY, 31st October, photo (B. Richards *et al.*).

(Breeds throughout Mediterranean basin from Iberia to Greece, but absent from many regions. Outside Europe, breeds locally from Mauritania & Canary Islands across NW Africa & Middle East to Arabian Peninsula & coastal S Iran. Most winter N African tropics, but some remain S Europe.)

Little Swift *Apus affinis* (0, 24, 1) *Rare, about one every 1–2 years*

Lothian Thorntonloch, Dunbar, 1CY+, 31st December (A. Brown, W. Edmond, M. Gladstone *et al.*).

(Breeds locally Morocco, & throughout Middle East from Israel to SE Iran & N along Euphrates River to SE Turkey. Largely resident, but some Middle East populations migratory. Elsewhere, resident or dispersive throughout sub-Saharan Africa & Indian subcontinent to Sri Lanka.)

Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus* (193, 178, 2) *About three per year; stable*

Clyde Dumbarton Castle then West Ferry, 3CY+ white-morph, 3rd January, photo (D. Greenwood, E., J. & P. McOwat).

Outer Hebrides Balranald, North Uist, 1CY female white-morph, 21st December into 2016, photo (A. MacDonald, B. Rabbitts *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 109: plate 95).

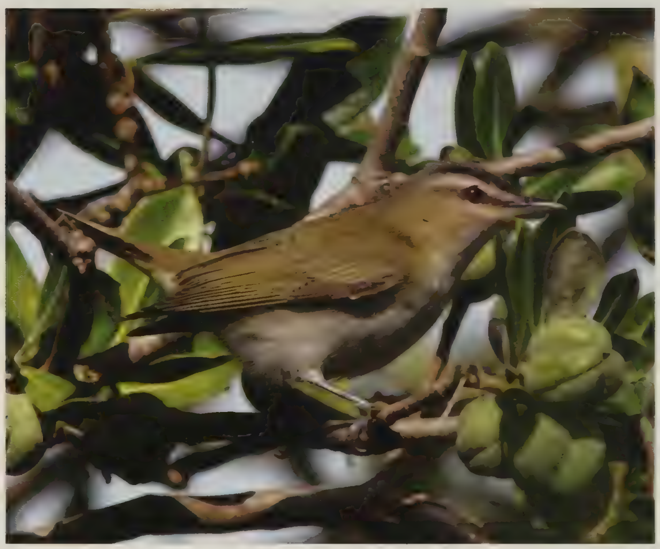
2009 Argyll Kilmoluaig and Loch Bhasapoll, Tiree, 2CY or 3CY white-morph, 24th–28th March, photo (J. Bowler *et al.*).

(In Europe, most numerous Iceland & Norway, smaller populations breeding N Sweden, Finland & Arctic Russia. To E, breeds Arctic Siberia, Alaska, N Canada & Greenland. European birds mostly resident but high-Arctic breeders from N Canada & Greenland migratory, occasionally wintering S to NW Europe.)

Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus* (0, 130, 1) *About 3–4 per year; stable*

Isles of Scilly Periglis and nearby areas, St Agnes, 1CY, 25th September to 2nd October, photo (R. J. G. Dawson *et al.*) (plate 325).

(Breeds throughout S Canada, & USA E of Rocky Mountains. Migrates throughout E USA to winter N South America. Other races resident South America.)


Martin Goodey

325. First-winter (1CY) Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*, St Agnes, Scilly, September 2015.

Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus* (0, 17, 1) *Rare, about one every 1–2 years, but recent increase*

Cornwall Porthgwarra, 1CY, 20th October, photo (D. P. Appleton *et al.*).

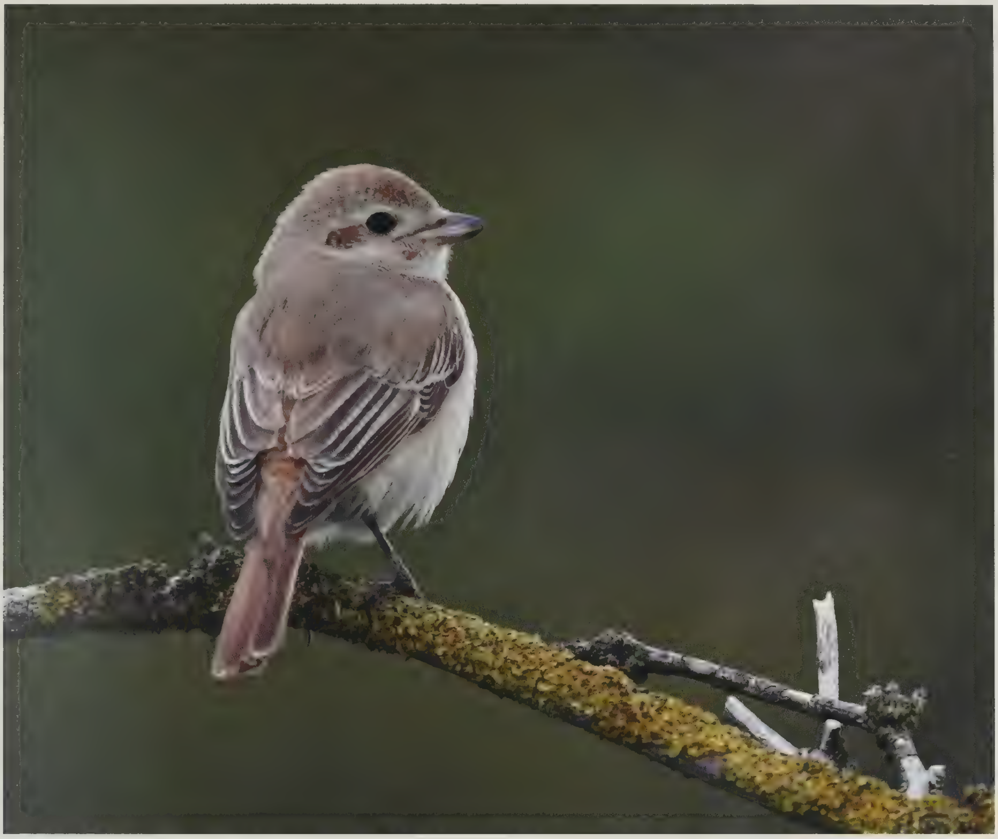
(Breeds Siberia from Ob River basin E to Sea of Okhotsk & Kamchatka, N Japan & throughout much of E China. Nominate *cristatus* winters Indian subcontinent & throughout SE Asia to Philippines, N Borneo & Indonesian islands.)

Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus* (0, 102, 5) *About three per year; stable*

Devon South Huish Marsh, 1CY, 13th–19th October, photo (A. F. Doidge, M. B. Passman, R. Stafford *et al.*).

Isles of Scilly The Plains, St Martin's, 2CY+ male *L. i. phoenicuroides*, 2nd July, photo (V. Jackson, W. H. Wagstaff, K. Webb *et al.*).

Norfolk Beeston Common, Sheringham, 1CY, 11th–19th October, photo (per birding information services) (plate 326). Paston, 2CY+ female, 12th–20th October, photo (M. Fiszer, R. Moores *et al.*). Holkham Freshmarsh, 1CY, 14th–19th October, photo (S. M. Lister *et al.*).



326. First-winter (1CY) Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*, Beeston Common, Norfolk, October 2015.

2002 Shetland Tresta, Fetlar, 2CY+ male *L. i. isabellinus*, 14th–17th September (*Brit. Birds* 96: 600, 108: 598–599); note revised location.

(Breeds widely across arid regions of C Asia from Caspian Sea & W Iran E to Tajikistan, Afghanistan, N Pakistan, S Mongolia & NW China, with isolated subspecies in Zaidam depression, N Tibetan Plateau. Winters NE & E Africa, S Arabian Peninsula, S Iran & NW Indian subcontinent.)

Lesser Grey Shrike *Lanius minor* (19, 173, 2) *About 2–3 per year; stable*

Norfolk Cromer, 1CY, 28th August, photo (per Norfolk Recorder).
Shetland Lunna, Mainland, 2CY+ female, 25th August, photo (H. R. Harrop, T. Holmes per Shetland Recorder).

(Breeds Balkans to E Poland, with small numbers W through N Mediterranean to S France & NE Spain. To E, breeds locally from Black Sea coasts, across S Russia & Kazakhstan to NW China & SW Siberia. Migrates through E Africa to winter S Africa, from Namibia to S Mozambique & N South Africa.)

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*

West Mediterranean islands race, 'Balearic Woodchat Shrike' *L. s. badius* (0, 11, 1) *Rare, about one every three years*

Yorkshire Wykeham Forest, Sawdon, 2CY male, 13th May, photo (R. Ashworth, B. Stephenson *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 108: plate 246).
2011 Isles of Scilly The Plains, St Martin's, 2CY male, 15th–19th May, photo (D. Miller, K. Webb *et al.*).

(Race *badius* restricted to W Mediterranean islands including Balearics, Corsica & Sardinia, E to Elba & Capraia. Winters W Africa, from Ivory Coast to N Cameroon.)

Peter Garrity

327. First-winter (1CY) Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, November 2015.

Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* (0, 9, 1) *Rare, about one every three years*

Derbyshire Chesterfield, 1CY, 8th–19th November, photo (R. A. Frost *et al.*) (plate 327).

(Breeds NW Africa & Iberian Peninsula N to S Germany & E through Mediterranean & C Asia, N to Baikal region of S Siberia, S to Tibetan Plateau & E to NE China. S European population mostly resident but Asian populations migratory, wintering NE Africa, & NW India to NC China.)

Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis* (11, 348, 9) *About eight per year; stable*

Co. Durham Marsden, 1CY, 2nd–7th November, photo (D. M. Foster *et al.* per Durham Recorder).

John Hewitt

328. First-winter (1CY) Arctic Warbler *Phylloscopus borealis*, Kilnsea, Yorkshire, September 2015.

Fair Isle Furse, 1CY, 8th September, photo (C. R. Hatsell, A. Vials *et al.*).
Lothian Skateraw, 1CY, 11th–16th September, photo (G. Hinchon *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Sands of Forvie, 1CY, 19th–20th August, photo (P. Shepherd *et al.*).
Shetland Dale of Walls, Mainland, 1CY, 25th August, photo (M. S. Chapman *et al.*). Scousburgh, Mainland, 1CY, 28th August, trapped, photo (J. N. Dymond, P. V. Harvey). Uyeasound, Unst, 1CY, 23rd–27th September, photo (B. J. & S. Robson, M. Tickner *et al.*), presumed same Cott, Mainland, 30th September to 2nd October, photo (D. Andrews *et al.* per Shetland Recorder).
Yorkshire Kilnsea, 1CY, 27th–29th September, photo (J. Hewitt, T. McEvoy, M. McLoughlin *et al.*) (plate 328). Spurn BO, 1CY, 4th October, trapped, photo (P. Collins *et al.*).

(Breeds locally N Scandinavia, becoming widespread across N Russia E to extreme NE Siberia, S to Baikal region, Ussuriland & NE China. Winters throughout SE Asia to Java, Philippines & Sulawesi.)

Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* (0, 136, 3) *About 4–5 per year, influx 2003 (28); increasing*

Dorset Weymouth, 1CY+, 30th October, photo (P. Moore, J. Stockwell).
Norfolk Wells Woods, 1CY+, 15th–20th October, photo (P. J. Dolton, A. Symes *et al.*).
Yorkshire Flamborough Head, 1CY+, 27th–28th October, photo (J. Mcloughlin, B. Richards *et al.*).
2014 Kent Dungeness BO, 2CY+, 2nd January to 12th March, photo (*Brit. Birds* 108: 605); note revised location.

(Breeds Altai Mountains to W Mongolia, S through Tien Shan & Pamirs to NE Afghanistan, NW Himalayas & mountains of NW China. Winters S Afghanistan to N India, E to W Bengal. Another race breeds C China from Hebei to S Yunnan, W to lower slopes of Tibetan Plateau.)

Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli* (1, 126, 8) *About 3–4 per year; stable or increasing*

Cornwall Bass Point, Lizard, 1CY+, 22nd August, sound recording (S. C. Votier *et al.*).
Dorset Portland BO, 1CY, 22nd–26th August, sound recording, trapped, photo (M. Lawn *et al.*).
Isles of Scilly Porth Killier, St Agnes, 1CY+, 21st August (R. J. G. Dawson, R. Higgins *et al.*). Longstone area, St Mary's, 1CY+, 22nd–27th August, photo (W. J. Scott *et al.*). Garrison, St Mary's, 1CY+, 19th September, photo (A. Gardener *et al.*).
Norfolk Hickling NWT, 2CY+ male in song, 26th May, sound recording (G. Etherington).
Shetland Sumburgh Head, Mainland, 1CY, 14th–18th September, trapped, photo, DNA analysis (P. Stronach *et al.*) (plate 329). Burrafirth, Unst, 1CY+, 15th–18th September, photo (R. Cartwright, A. M. Conlin, R. Foyster, E. Williams *et al.*).

A stunning *Phylloscopus*, Western Bonelli's Warbler is still a highly sought-after 'rare', even though it has shown a marked increase in numbers in the past decade, with the top five years all occurring since 2006 (fig. 5). The geographical spread in 2015 is consistent with their long-term UK distribution, with four of the top five counties featuring here. Scilly is the leading county (23 since 1950) followed by Norfolk (16), Shetland (15), Cornwall (13) and Yorkshire (9). Dorset also has a good track record with the Portland bird being the seventh for that county. The timing of the 2015 records is also entirely typical: September is by far the best month

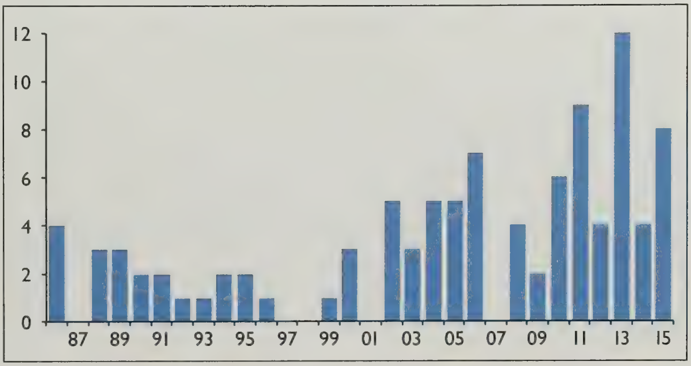


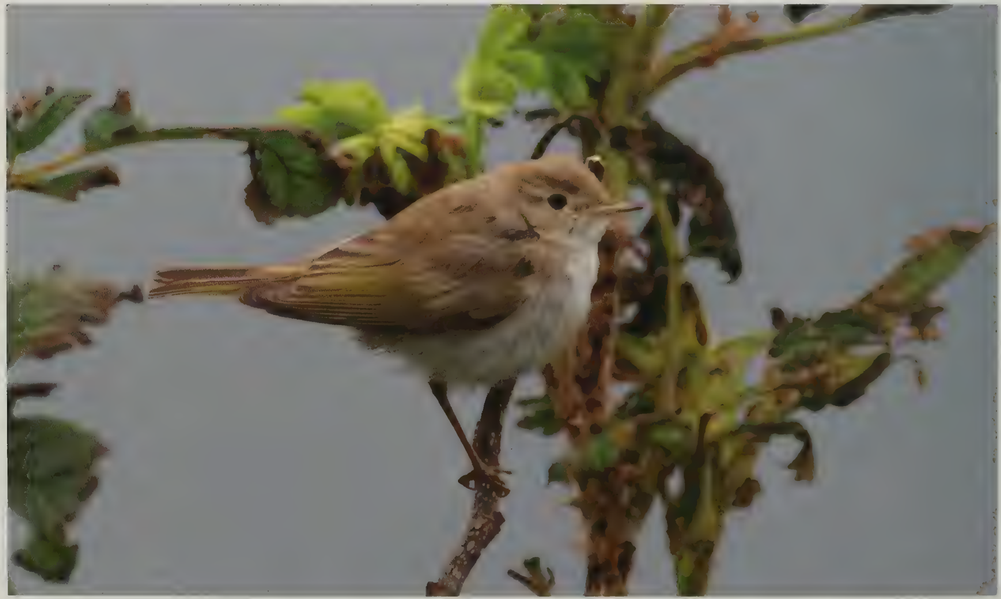
Fig. 5. Records of Western Bonelli's Warblers *Phylloscopus bonelli* in Britain, 1986–2015.

(43% of records), followed by October (21%), August (20%) and May (7%).

Separating the two Bonelli's warbler species can be a significant challenge. While there is a range of plumage, bare-part and morphological differences between the two species, there is, on current evidence, so much overlap that these alone may render identification virtually impossible, even in the hand. Vocalisations can make life a lot easier. Western Bonelli's has a disyllabic contact call, often likened to that of Willow Warbler *P. trochilus.* While this comparison is broadly valid, the calls of the two species are really rather different: Western Bonelli's gives a 'spu-üiu' with a strong upward inflection towards the end of the second syllable, whereas the familiar 'hoo-eet' call of Willow Warbler rather fades away at the end of the second syllable. In stark contrast, the call of Eastern Bonelli's *P. orientalis* is quite different, being a harsh monotone 'chip'. Songs may also be useful, but the differences are subtle to many and a sound recording may be required to separate the two with confidence.

A final separation method is the use of molecular techniques. In the last decade the use of DNA to resolve bird identification challenges has proved nothing short of revolutionary. The premise is that it is now relatively straightforward to extract DNA from a small quantity of avian tissue (in many instances from feathers), amplify a particular section (often coding for a single gene, such as the mitochondrial cytochrome-*b* or 12S ribosomal RNA gene) and then compare the sequence of base pairs from the sample with the same sequence of base pairs from reference specimens and to test for similarities/differences. In Britain, Martin Collinson and his research group have almost single-handedly taken on the task of such analyses and this has provided extremely valuable information on the identification of many cryptic taxa.

Marked genetic differences have been important in the decision to assign species rank to the two Bonelli's warblers (Helbig *et al.* 1995, 2002), and consequently this should be a certain means of identification. The first of the two Shetland birds was not heard to call and showed some plumage features consistent with Eastern Bonelli's, yet biometrics more similar to Western. The DNA results, described more fully elsewhere in this issue (Collinson *et al.* 2016, pp. 637–638), were unexpected (in summary, the DNA supports identification as Western Bonelli's, but it was surprisingly different from other samples of the species) and raised some interesting points. First, the use of molecular techniques to aid identification is only as good as the known reference sequences. There are large parts of the range of the two species where no sampling has been carried out, and in cases like this we should always be cautious about interpreting the results – a


Roger Riddington

329. First-winter (1CY) Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli*, Sumburgh Head, Shetland, September 2015.

lesson learnt during the misidentification of the two 'Southern' skuas based on DNA evidence (Votier *et al.* 2004, 2007). Second, it raises the intriguing possibility that there is still more to be learnt about the taxonomy of the Bonelli's warbler complex (see the BirdLife Taxonomic Working Group for a different take on the status of *bonelli* and *orientalis*: www.birdlife.org/datazone/species/factsheet/22730987). Such unexpected surprises and the spirit of discovery is something that the late Martin Garner would have revelled in.

(Breeds SW Europe from Iberia to N France, S Germany, Italy, Austria, & locally in mountains of N Africa. Winters along S edge of Sahara, from Senegal & S Mauritania to N Cameroon.)

Western Bonelli's/Eastern Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli/orientalis* (0, 77, 3)

Devon East Soar, 1CY+, 27th August, photo (B. Rankine, F. York).
Greater Manchester Higher End, Billinge, 1CY, 31st August, photo (D. J. Pendlebury).
Isles of Scilly Garrison, St Mary's, 1CY+, 19th September, photo (M. Goodey, K. Webb *et al.*).

On the morning of 19th September, Andrew Gardner found a Bonelli's warbler at the Garrison on St Mary's, which was heard to give the characteristic calls of Western Bonelli's. In the early evening of the same day, however, two Bonelli's were seen in the same area, but no calls were heard. These *could* have been two new arrivals, but it was felt most likely that this was the earlier Western Bonelli's along with a fellow traveller, which could not be pinned down to species level.

(Western Bonelli's Warbler – see above. Eastern Bonelli's Warbler breeds E Mediterranean, from Bosnia-Hercegovina to S Bulgaria & Greece, E to S Turkey. Winters NE Africa, from Sudan to Ethiopia.)

Iberian Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus ibericus* (0, 38, 9) *About 1–2 per year; recent increase*

Gower Undisclosed site, 2CY+ male, 2CY+ female and seven 1CY, 15th May to 5th July, photo (E. A. Hunter) (*Brit. Birds* 109: 462).
1995 Derbyshire Drakelow, 2CY+ male in song, 12th–25th May, sound recording (T. Cockburn, M. J. Williams *et al.*).

The year 2015 saw the first breeding record of Iberian Chiffchaff in Britain, in Gower. Ed Hunter's thorough documentation of this unprecedented record made for an outstanding submission, which included sound recordings and sonograms of the song of the male and the calls of both parents, and which was voted the winner of the BBRC's Carl Zeiss Award 2016 (French 2016).

Of the 38 singing male Iberian Chiffchaffs in Britain since 1972, eight were present for just one day but 20 have stayed for at least a week, and of those a total of 12 remained for more than a month (fig. 6) – including one in Carmarthenshire in 2013 for 83 days. This is presumably – at least in part – an indication of active migrants staying briefly, with longer stays by birds

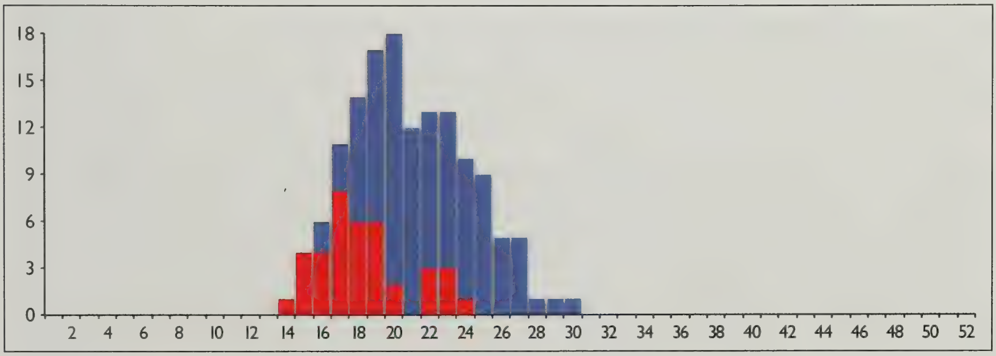


Fig. 6. Weekly discovery dates and presence of male Iberian Chiffchaffs *Phylloscopus ibericus* in Britain, 1972–2015. Red shows week of first arrival, blue shows total number of birds present each week where this exceeds the number of new arrivals.

occupying territories in suitable breeding habitat. Set in this context, the breeding record in 2015 is perhaps not quite as surprising as it may at first seem.

Only one non-singing Iberian Chiffchaff has been accepted in Britain: a calling bird at Flamborough Head, Yorkshire, on 25th–30th April 2013. In fact, the characteristic downward-inflected call – resembling the flight call of a Siskin *Spinus spinus* – may be a safer indication of the identification of an Iberian Chiffchaff than the song (Magnus Robb *in litt.*), especially since it is known that Common Chiffchaffs *P. collybita* may incorporate alien syllables into their song (Neubauer & Bobrek 2013).

In the absence of genetic material, confident identification of silent potential Iberian Chiffchaffs remains problematic, even for birds in the hand, since there are no morphological differences to allow certain identification and relying on plumage alone to identify a vagrant may prove simplistic (Collinson & Melling 2008; Dermongin 2016).

(Breeds locally French Pyrenees & S throughout W Iberia. N African range restricted to NW Morocco & N Algeria to NW Tunisia. Wintering range poorly known.)

Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans*

'Eastern Subalpine Warbler' *S. c. cantillans/albistriata* (1, [60], 2) *Uncertain*

Outer Hebrides Europie, Lewis, 2CY+ female, 4th–5th September, photo (B. A. E. Marr, A. Williams *et al.*).

Yorkshire Flamborough Head, 2CY+ male, 1st September to 1st October, photo (P. Cunningham, M. S. Garner *et al.*).

2009 Shetland Scousburgh, Mainland, 2CY male *S. c. albistriata*, 19th May, trapped, photo, DNA analysis (*Brit. Birds* 105: 624–625; 108: 608).

'Western Subalpine Warbler' *S. c. iberiae/inornata* (1, [0], 2) *Uncertain*

Fair Isle Observatory, 2CY male, 30th June to 3rd July, trapped, photo, DNA analysis (L. V. Gregory, D. Parnaby *et al.*).

Orkney Gravity, North Ronaldsay, 2CY male, 20th–21st June, trapped, photo, DNA analysis (M. Warren *et al.*).

Birders might be forgiven for not being completely sure what is going on with Subalpine Warblers! The situation was explained by Stoddart (2016), but it is worth repeating that BBRC will consider *only* those individuals that can be identified to either group – Eastern Subalpine Warbler or Western Subalpine Warbler. Submissions of individuals that can be identified only as 'Subalpine Warbler' should be passed to the relevant county recorder for local assessment.

The bird in Shetland in 2009 is another 'Eastern Subalpine Warbler' assigned to the subspecies *S. c. albistriata* after DNA analysis. Currently, there is no DNA reference material for 'Western Subalpine Warbler' of the form *S. c. inornata*, so even those individuals which yield a sample, as was the case with both birds in 2015, cannot be matched to a particular subspecies.

(Race *cantillans* breeds S Italy & Sicily; race *albistriata* breeds SE Europe from Slovenia & Croatia S to Greece, Aegean Islands, Crete & W Turkey; race *iberiae* breeds Iberian Peninsula, S France & NW Italy; race *inornata* breeds Morocco, N Algeria, Tunisia & NW Libya. In winter, *inornata* probably resident/dispersive in NW Africa, other races winter Sahel from Senegal & Sudan; ranges poorly known due to identification issues.)

Moltoni's Warbler *Sylvia subalpina* (1, 4, 3) *Very rare, last in 2014 (two)*

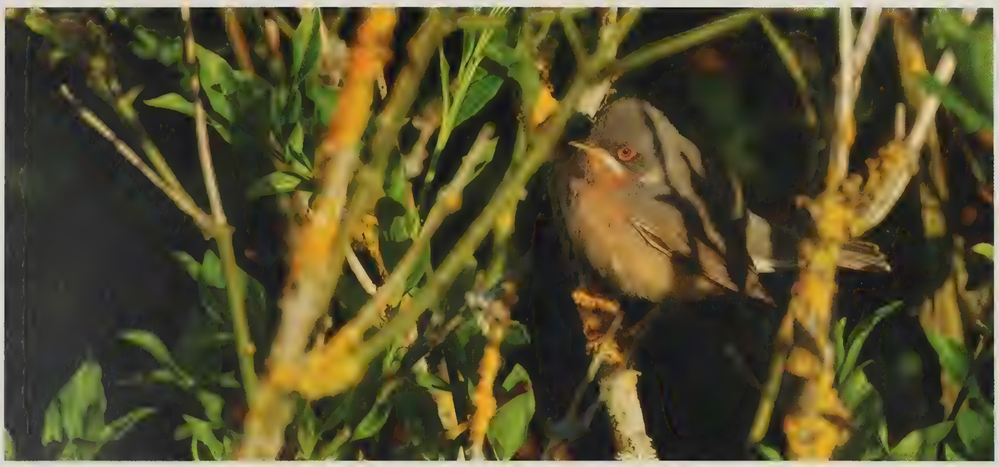
Fair Isle Observatory then Meadow Burn, 2CY+ male, 15th–25th May, trapped, photo, DNA analysis (L. V. Gregory, K. Pellow *et al.*).

Norfolk Blakeney Point, 2CY+ male, 11th May, sound recording, photo (P. Nichols, A. M. Stoddart *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 108: plate 227; plate 330).

Outer Hebrides Balranald, North Uist, 2CY+ male, 4th June, photo (S. Bloomfield, W. Carter, S. E. Duffield).

2014 Isles of Scilly Green Bay, Bryher, 2CY+, 16th May (J. K. Higginson, W. H. Wagstaff).

(Breeds Mallorca, Corsica, Sardinia & Ligurian Apennines, Italy. Wintering area unknown.)



John Richardson

330. Male Moltoni's Warbler *Sylvia subalpina*, Blakeney Point, Norfolk, May 2015.

Sardinian Warbler *Sylvia melanocephala* (0, 78, 1) *About 2–3 per year; stable or decreasing*

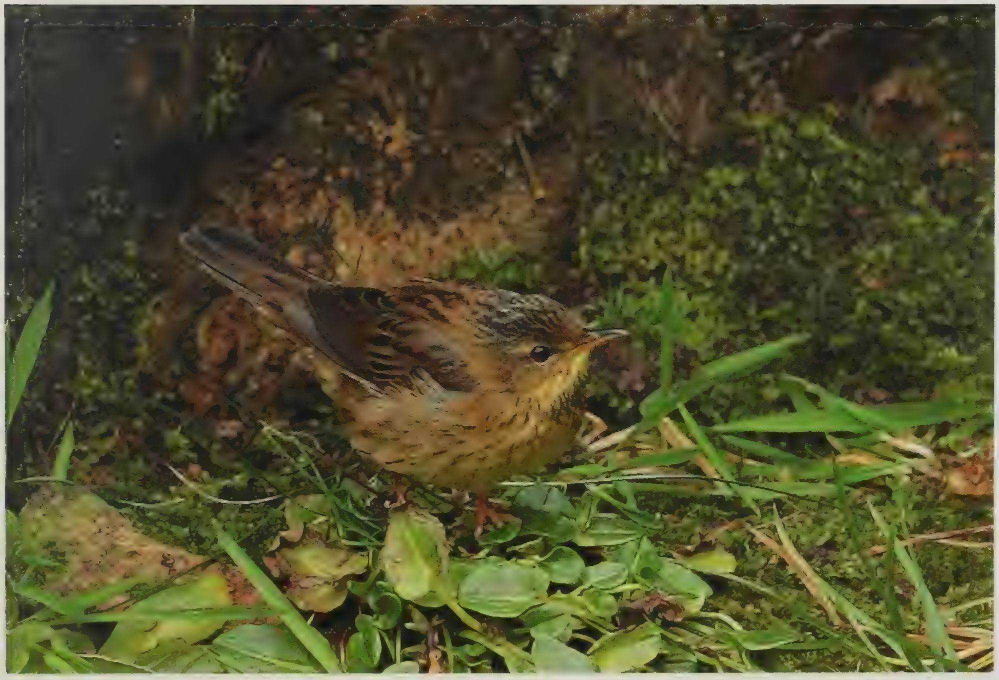
Cornwall Land's End, 2CY male in song, 14th–26th May, photo (J. FitzGerald-Patrick *et al.* per birding information services).

(Largely resident or dispersive throughout Mediterranean basin, from NW Africa & Iberia to S France, N Italy & E to W Turkey & Israel. Some winter N Africa from Sahara S to Mauritania & S Libya.)

Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola* (1, 52, 1) *About 1–2 per year; increasing*

Fair Isle Wirvie Burn, 1CY, 19th October, photo (C. R. Hatsell *et al.*) (plate 331).

(Breeds Siberia from Irtysh River E to Yakutia & Sea of Okhotsk, & SW Siberia & NE Kazakhstan through Mongolia to Ussuriland & N & NE China. Winters Sri Lanka & NE India to S China, & S throughout SE Asia.)



Steve Arlow

331. Juvenile (1CY) Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella certhiola*, Fair Isle, October 2015.

Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* (7, 140, 4) *About four per year; increasing*

Fair Isle Sukka Mire, 1CY, 27th September, photo (L. V. Gregory *et al.*). Kenaby, 1CY, 12th October, trapped, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).
Shetland Dale of Walls, Mainland, 1CY, 26th September, trapped, photo (T. P. Drew, W. T. S. Miles, R. Riddington, R. M. Tallack, T. J. Wells *et al.*). Housay, Out Skerries, 1CY, 5th October, photo (P. Forrest, M. J. McKee, L. Pyke, C. Turner *et al.*).

(Singing males regular SE Finland. To E, discontinuously from C Urals E to Kamchatka, Kuril Islands, Hokkaido & NE China. Winters Indian subcontinent, from Nepal E through NE India to SE Asia & Philippines.)

Savi's Warbler *Locustella luscinioides* (11, 632, 4) *About eight per year, breeding; recent decrease now stable*

Cornwall Gunwalloe Marshes, Lizard, 2CY+ male in song, 19th April intermittently to 2nd May (I. M. D. Maclean *et al.*).
Kent Stonelees, 2CY+ male in song, 25th April, sound recording (A. M. Lipczynski, F. Solly). Stodmarsh, 2CY+ male in song, 4th May (M. Hindle).
Norfolk St Benet's Level, Ludham, 2CY+ male in song, 12th May (M. Crossfield, N. Robson).
2014 Cambridgeshire Nene Washes RSPB, 2CY+ male in song, 13th May to 6th July, sound recording (*Brit. Birds* 108: 610); note revised dates.

With over 630 modern records, this is one of the more frequently occurring species considered by BBRC; in fact, only Tawny Pipit (1,200+) and Aquatic Warbler (1,300+), both returning to national rarity status in 2015 due to declining numbers, have more records. Yet Savi's Warbler is still a top find in many parts of Britain. The four from 2015 mostly follow the expected pattern of singing birds in spring in the southeast, although the Cornish bird is only the third for that great rarity-finding county. Kent alone accounts for 25% of all records, with Norfolk not far behind with 23% and Suffolk third with a further 16%. Other records are well scattered around England, and it remains genuinely rare in Scotland and Wales, with only 13 and six records respectively. The reedbeds of Kent and East Anglia between mid April and early May offer the would-be rarity finder their best chance of locating one. Nocturnal ramblings may prove particularly effective for finding this species, which sings frequently during the night.

That there are so few autumn records is surprising (fig. 7), and the fact that there are no autumn records for Shetland, away from Fair Isle, especially so. Could it be that for some reason

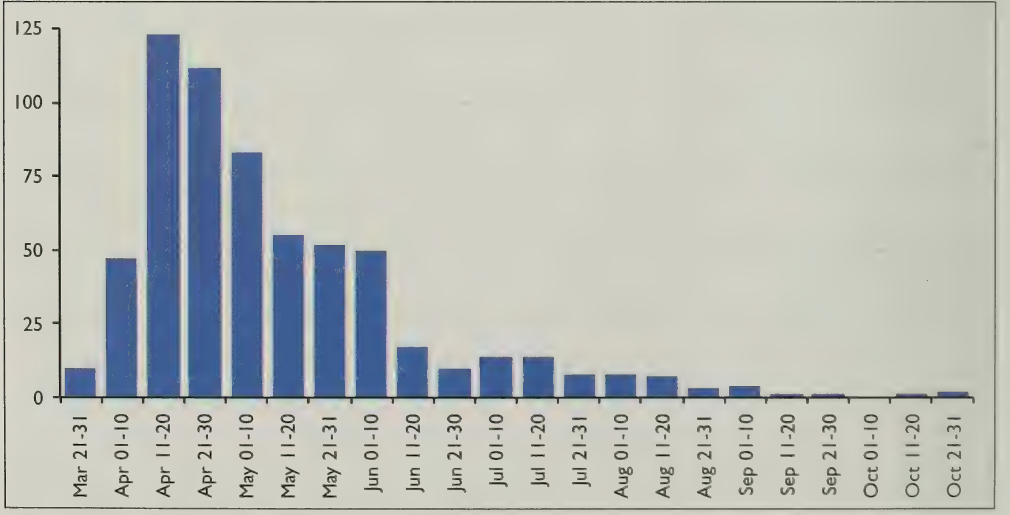


Fig. 7. Records of Savi's Warblers *Locustella luscinioides* in Britain since 1950, illustrating the peak in arrival dates from mid April to early May (including data from the period when Savi's Warbler was treated as a scarce migrant).

Savi's is less prone to vagrancy than other *Locustella* species at this time?

(Nominate race breeds Iberia N to S Scandinavia, & E through E Europe, Russia & Ukraine to Black Sea coasts, & winters W Africa from Senegal to N Nigeria. Eastern race *fusca* breeds C Asia to NW China & W Mongolia, & winters NE Africa.)

Thick-billed Warbler *Iduna aedon* (0, 5, 1) *Very rare, last in 2003, 2013*

Shetland Quendale, Mainland, 1CY+, 24th September, photo (P. Aley, R. Riddington, S. M. R. Young *et al.*) (fig. 8).

The sixth for Britain, the sixth for Shetland (including two on Fair Isle) and the fourth since 2001. Are they becoming more regular or is increased observer coverage responsible for the current run of four in 15 years? The 2003 Fair Isle bird was in mid May, but all the others have turned up between mid September and early October, so the Quendale bird this year fits the developing pattern nicely.

There's a nice account of the bird's discovery at: www.birdguides.com/webzine/article.asp?a=5252

(Breeds S Siberia from Ob basin & N Mongolia to Ussuriland & NE China. Winters Nepal E through NE India to Indochina & C Thailand.)

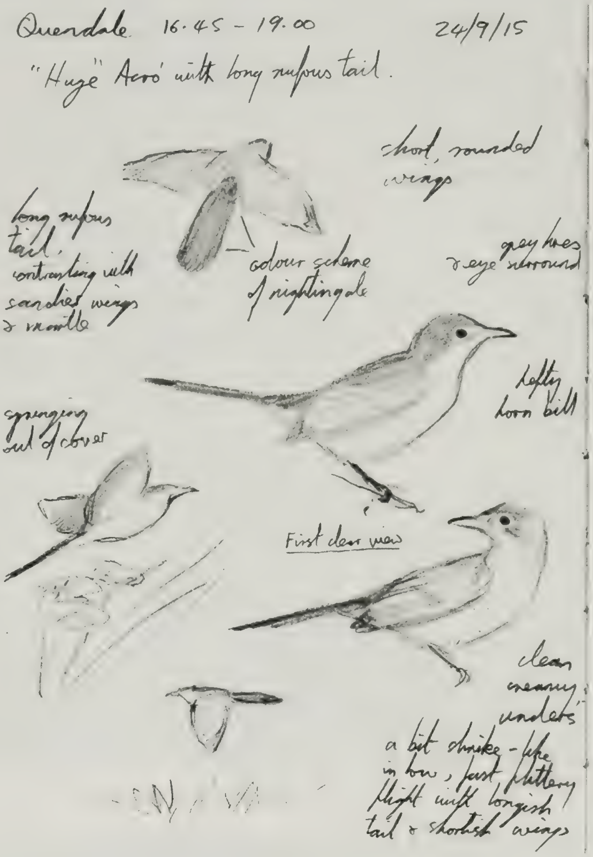

Quendale 16.45 – 19.00 24/9/15
"Huge" Acro' with long rufous tail.
short, rounded wings
long rufous tail, contrasting with sandier wings & mantle
colour scheme of nightingale
grey lores & eye surround
hefty horn bill
springing out of cover
First clear view
clean creamy underts
a bit shrike-like in bow, fast fluttery flight with longish tail & shortish wings

Fig. 8. Thick-billed Warbler *Iduna aedon*, Quendale, Shetland, September 2015.

Pete Aley

Booted Warbler *Iduna caligata* (1, 151, 5) *About 4–5 per year; stable*

Fair Isle Lower Leogh, 1CY, 19th–22nd August, photo (C. R. Hatsell *et al.*).
Norfolk Gramborough Hill, Salthouse, 1CY, 22nd–24th August, photo (per Norfolk Recorder).
Orkney North Ronaldsay, 1CY, 21st–22nd August, photo (J. Scragg, M. Warren *et al.*).
Shetland Sumburgh Farm, Mainland, 1CY, 22nd August, photo (R. A. Haywood, L. Johnson, J. D. Okill). Sumburgh, Mainland, 1CY, 9th–14th September, photo (M. S. Chapman *et al.*).
2013 North-east Scotland Drums, 1CY+, 26th–27th August, photo (C. N. Gibbins *et al.*).

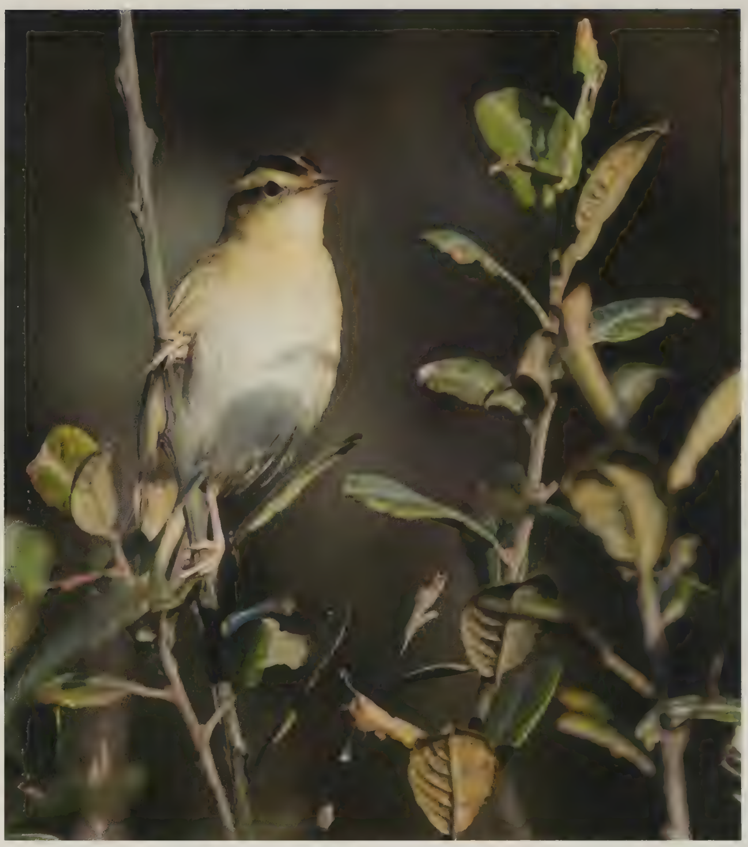
(Breeds E Finland, E to C Russia & W Siberia to Yenisey valley, C & N Kazakhstan to W Mongolia & W Xinjiang province, China. Winters N & peninsular India, S to Karnataka.)

Eastern Olivaceous Warbler *Iduna pallida* (0, 19, 1) *Rare, about one every two years*

Shetland Skaw, Whalsay, 1CY, 12th–16th September, trapped, photo (J. Dunn, J. L. Irvine, B. Marshall, P. Stronach).

(Race *elaeica* breeds Balkans & Greece E to Turkey, S Caucasus, S Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iraq, Iran & N Afghanistan. Migrates through Middle East to winter E Africa. Other races breed North Africa, some wintering to S of breeding range.)

Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola* (40, 1349, 3) *About ten per year, recent decrease*


Anthony Blunden

332. Juvenile (1CY) Aquatic Warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*, Lizard, Cornwall, October 2015.

Cornwall Lizard, 1CY, 3rd October, photo (A. Blunden) (plate 332).
Fair Isle Meadow Burn, 1CY, 15th–16th August, photo (L. V. Gregory *et al.*).
Suffolk Orfordness, 1CY, 9th August, trapped, photo (D. Crawshaw, M. C. Marsh *et al.*).

The declining fortunes of the Aquatic Warbler as a breeding bird in Europe are reflected in the numbers reaching Britain, and with just three records this year its return to the BBRC fold is justified. The numbers reported in recent years have been highly dependent on the efforts of ringers in southern Britain in early autumn. If we were limited to sight records, this species would not be recorded annually in Britain.

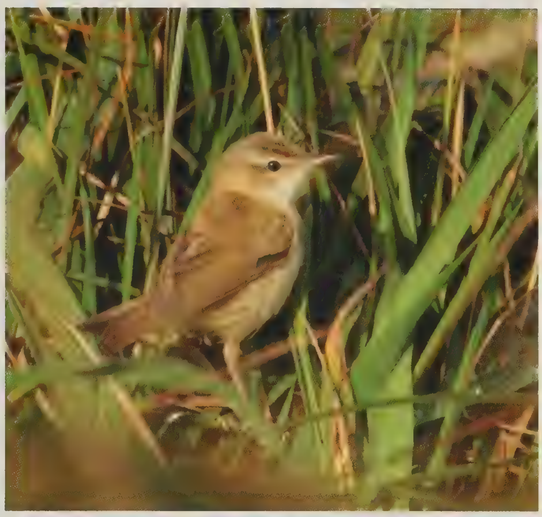
(Breeds locally NE Germany, Poland, Belarus & Russia E to S Urals, with isolated population in Hungary. Entire population migrates along North Sea and Atlantic coasts to winter in N tropics of W Africa.)

Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* (1, 100, 5) *About three per year; increasing*

Dorset Undisclosed site, 1CY, 26th–27th September, trapped, photo (observers' names withheld).
Fair Isle Da Water, 1CY, 8th October, photo (H. J. Fearn, C. Griffin, P. Woollen *et al.*) (plate 333).
Norfolk Blakeney Point, 2CY+, 11th–14th June, photo (J. R. McCallum, K. B. Shepherd *et al.*).
North-east Scotland Collieston, 1CY, 28th–29th August, photo (P. S. Crockett *et al.*).
Shetland Noss, 2CY+, 22nd July to 16th August, photo (A. Denton, C. Nisbet *et al.*).

The best annual total for this species remains the nine birds in 1994, but the trend is still most definitely upwards. By the end of the 1980s, Britain's total was just 17 birds but there were 27 in the 1990s, 32 in the 2000s, and these five take the total to 30 since 2010.

Arrival dates now span almost the entire period from mid May to mid November, but there is still a clear peak in September (45 records), and October (28); these two months account for over 70% of all records. The latest autumn arrival, one trapped in Cornwall on 16th November 1996, remained until 28th December. Even more unusual was an overwintering bird in Sussex in 2012 (from 30th January to 13th March 2012); Pagham Harbour is a long way from India! Consequently, April is the only month that a Paddyfield Warbler has never been recorded in Britain.


Steve Arlow

333. First-winter (1CY) Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola*, Fair Isle, Shetland, October 2015.

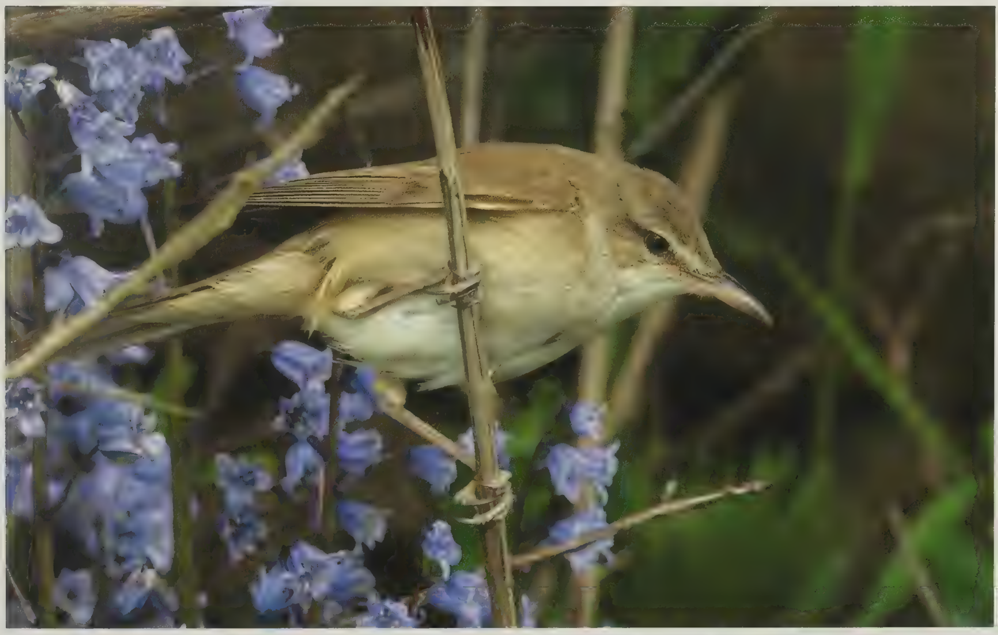
Spring records, such as the bird in Norfolk in 2015, number just 18, and are all in May and June, with arrival dates between 20th May 2013 on North Ronaldsay (Orkney) and 30th June 2012 on Fair Isle. A new, if still rare, phenomenon is the arrival of birds in late summer/early autumn. The two in 2015 bring the total in late July or August to eight, all since 2006. The other six have included adults in Shetland on 6th August 2010 and Dorset on 21st July 2011, and first-winters in Yorkshire on 13th August 2006, Shetland on 17th August 2008 and 22nd–23rd August 2010 and Cornwall on 31st August 2014. It is interesting to speculate where these early autumn migrants originate from, given that the nearest regular breeding areas are along the western Black Sea coast: in Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine, although it has bred in the Netherlands.

(Breeds Black Sea coast from N Bulgaria & Danube delta E to Ukraine. To E, breeds widely across steppes of S Russia & SW Siberia, Kazakhstan, NW China & W Mongolia, S to Uzbekistan & N Pakistan. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent.)

Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* (7, 270, 2) *About five per year; stable*

Shetland Baltasound, Unst, 2CY+ male in song, 3rd–22nd June, photo (D. Leask, B. H. Thomason *et al.*) (plate 334).

West Midlands Sandwell Valley, 2CY+ male in song, 18th May, photo (P. Hackett, M. J. Hadlington *et al.*).


Brydon Thomason

334. Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*, Baltasound, Unst, Shetland, June 2015.

2012 Cornwall Gunwalloe Marshes, Lizard, 2CY+ male in song, 3rd–6th June, photo (E. Griffiths, D. K. Parker *et al.*).

(Breeds throughout much of continental Europe from Iberia to Greece, N to S Sweden & S Finland, & E across S Russia, Turkey & Caucasus to W Siberia. C Asian race *zarudnyi* breeds from Volga to NW China & W Mongolia. Winters throughout C & S Africa.)

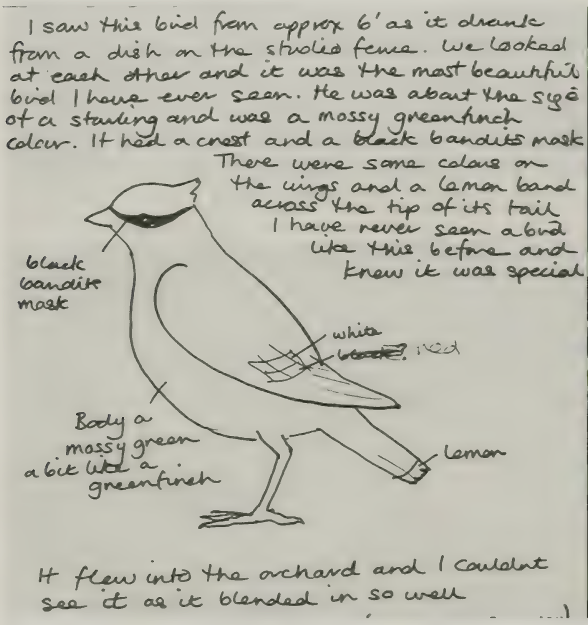
Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum* (0, 3, 3) *Very rare, last in 1996, 2013*

Argyll Scarinish, Tiree, 3CY+ male, 10th June, photo (K. Gillon).
Isles of Scilly Rosehill, St Mary's, 3CY+ male, 2nd June (P. Swanborough) (fig. 9), presumed same Old Town, St Mary's, 19th June, photo (N. A. J. Hudson, M. Tucker *et al.*) (plate 335).
Pembrokeshire Treginnis, St Davids, 2CY+, 26th June, found dead, photo (C. Orgill).

With the three previous records spread over a period of nearly 30 years (June 1985, Noss, Shetland; February 1996, Nottingham; and September 2013, Tiree, Argyll), the occurrence of three in just 24 days is remarkable. Even more surprising was the transatlantic support cast discovered at or around the same time: Swainson's Thrushes *Catharus ustulatus* in Shetland and Pembrokeshire, a Veery *C. fuscescens* on Orkney, Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis* and Grey-cheeked Thrush *C. minimus* in southern Ireland and, just one day before the Scilly bird, another Cedar Waxwing in Co. Clare. A list of vagrants much more akin to autumn gales in September and October than May and June.

The Scilly bird was seen on the first date by a non-birder but it reappeared some 17 days later only half a kilometre away, giving a few local birders an opportunity to catch up with it.

(Breeds Canada from coastal British Columbia E to Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, and in USA from SE Alaska and N California to N Alabama and N Georgia; winters throughout USA and S to Panama.)

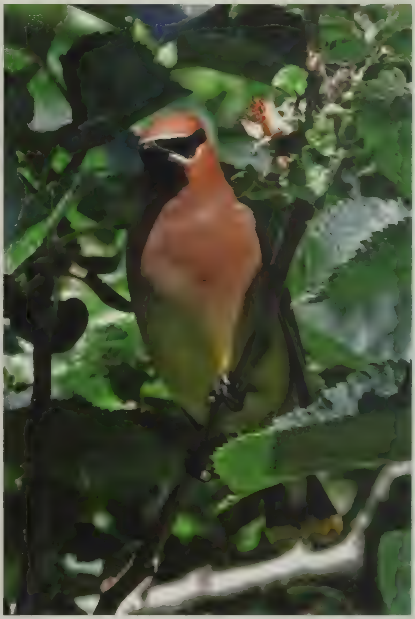


I saw this bird from approx 6' as it drank from a dish on the studio fence. We looked at each other and it was the most beautiful bird I have ever seen. He was about the size of a starling and was a mossy greenfinch colour. It had a crest and a black bandits mask

There were some colours on the wings and a lemon band across the tip of its tail I have never seen a bird like this before and knew it was special

It flew into the orchard and I couldnt see it as it blended in so well

Patsy Swanborough



Martin Goodey

Fig. 9 & 335. Adult (3CY+) male Cedar Waxwing *Bombycilla cedrorum*, St Mary's, Scilly, June 2015.

Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla* (0, 27, 2) *Rare, about one every 1–2 years*

Kent Dungeness, 1CY+, 10th September, photo (D. Bunney, O. J. Leyshon *et al.*).
Sussex Beachy Head, 1CY+, 27th October, photo (D., D. R. & J. F. Cooper *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 109: 461, plate 336).

(Mostly resident S Spain N to Denmark & E to Poland, W Ukraine & Greece. Elsewhere, resident in mountains of N Africa, W Turkey & W Caucasus.)

John Cooper

336. Short-toed Treecreeper *Certhia brachydactyla*, Beachy Head, Sussex, October 2015.

Dipper *Cinclus cinclus*

North European race, 'Black-bellied Dipper' *C. c. cinclus* (–, [26], 2)

Uncertain – historical records required

Shetland Skaw, Unst, 2CY, 24th February to 18th March, photo (R. J. Brookes, R. M. Tallack per Shetland Recorder). Voe, Mainland, 2CY+, 2nd to 13th March, photo (M. S. Chapman, C. Mouatt *et al.*).

Yorkshire Harpham, 1CY+, 19th October 2014 to 25th March, photo (*Brit. Birds* 108: 613, plate 134).

(Race *cinclus* breeds Scandinavia, Baltic countries & W Russia. Outside the breeding season, resident or dispersive to S & W of breeding range.)

White's Thrush *Zoothera dauma* (27, 55, 2) *About 1–2 per year; increasing*

Shetland Baltasound, Unst, 1CY+, 20th October, photo (P. N. Collin, B. C. Minshull, K. D. Shaw, R. T. Whytock *et al.*). Gulberwick, Mainland, 1CY+, 23rd–24th October (L. Dalziel, A. Ockendon).

(Race *aurea* breeds European Urals & E across Siberia from Yenisey River to Ussuriland, S to N Mongolia, extreme NE China, Korean Peninsula & Japan. Winters widely across S China, Taiwan & S Japan to Indochina & C Thailand. Nominate race resident or altitudinal migrant in Himalayas, SW China & Taiwan.)

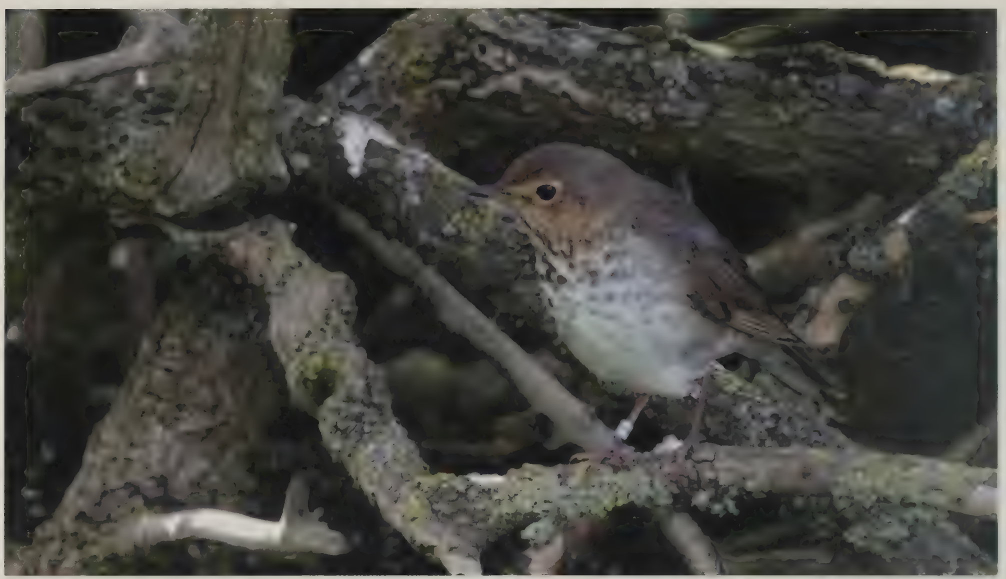
Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus* (0, 32, 4) *Rare, about one per year*

Orkney Lady, Sanday, 1CY, 28th September, photo (I. Hartley *et al.*).

Pembrokeshire Skokholm, 2CY, 2nd–10th June, trapped, photo, DNA analysis (R. Brown *et al.*) (plate 337).

Shetland Houbie, Fetlar, 2CY, 15th–16th June, photo (M. Chivers, A. Last, T. Sherlock *et al.*). Baltasound, Unst, 1CY, 4th October, photo (J. J. Sweeney *et al.*).

The four records in 2015 make it the best year to date for Swainson's Thrush in Britain, and the two in June are the first spring records for Europe. Skokholm managed a notable double: as well as the first British record, on 14th–19th October 1967, the island can now boast the first spring record too. Later in the same month, one on Fetlar would normally have been surprising but, given the number of other Nearctic passerines that turned up the same month, it didn't raise as many eyebrows as perhaps it should.



Richard Brown

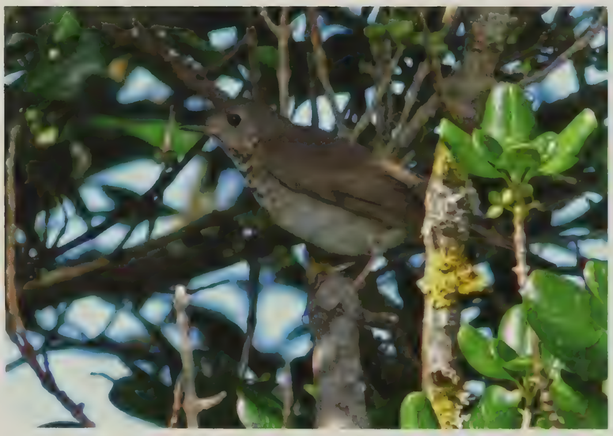
337. First-summer (2CY) Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus*, Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, June 2015.

The history of this species in Britain falls neatly into two distinct phases. The first 18 records were predominantly in southern and southwestern Britain, including eight on Scilly, four in Cornwall or Devon and singles in Kent and Pembrokeshire. The remaining four were on Scottish islands: Shetland 1980, Fair Isle 1990, Orkney 1993 and, the last of the twentieth century, on the Outer Hebrides in 1996.

The majority of the 18 records since 2000 have been on Scottish islands, the exceptions being three on Scilly (the most recent in 2004) and this year's bird on Skokholm. The mean autumn arrival date has also come forward by more than a week, from 13th October in the first period to 4th October in the second. This shift in timing and distribution is usually attributed to changes in the position of the jet stream.

We often remark on the role that luck plays in finding a rare bird, as well as skill, determination and effort. The autumn bird in Shetland this year, found by former BBRC member John Sweeney, was discovered hopping around underneath parked cars outside the garage café in Baltasound. Surely a candidate for the best-ever cheese toastie?!

(Breeds S Alaska & Canada E to S Labrador & Newfoundland, S to N California, New Mexico, Great Lakes & West Virginia. Migrates across E USA to winter from Mexico S to NW Argentina.)



Martin Goodey

338. First-winter (1CY) Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus*, St Agnes, Scilly, September 2015.

Grey-cheeked Thrush *Catharus minimus* (0, 61, 2)

About 1–2 per year, influx 1986 (12); stable or decreasing

Isles of Scilly St Warna's Cove, St Agnes, 1CY, 23rd–25th September, photo (R. Hathway *et al.*) (plate 338).

Shetland Ollaberry, Mainland, 1CY, 28th September, photo (S. Browne, P. Buxton, R. Hoare *et al.*).

(Breeds extreme NE Siberia, & E through Alaska & N Canada to Labrador & Newfoundland. Migrates across E USA to winter N South America.)

Veery *Catharus fuscescens* (0, 10, 1) *Rare, about one every three years*

Orkney Holland House, North Ronaldsay, 2CY male in song, 30th May to 9th June, trapped, photo (G. A. D. Woodbridge *et al.*).

This, the second for Orkney, turned out to be an unusually long stayer; in fact, only the famous bird on Lundy, Devon (which remained from 10th October to 11th November in 1987), hung around for longer. It was not the first spring Veery in Britain, since Lundy's second was found on 14th May 1997. Veery remains a seriously rare bird in Britain, and the population is thought to be in a moderate decline (www.birdlife.org/datazone/species/factsheet/22708655). The far north and west of Scotland has accounted for all six of the records since 2000, whereas four of the five before that were in Devon and Cornwall; the southwest's traditional monopoly of *Catharus* thrushes is well and truly broken.

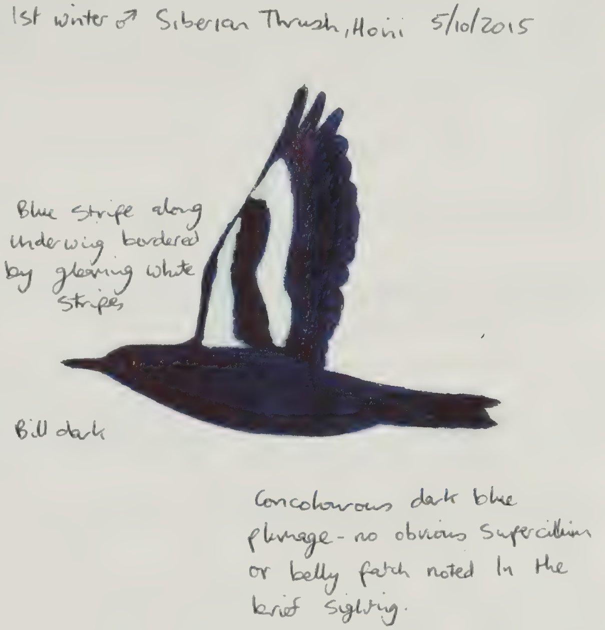
(Breeds Canada from S British Columbia E to Newfoundland, S through USA E of Rocky Mountains to N Arizona & Georgia. Winters N South America from Colombia to NW Brazil.)

Siberian Thrush *Geokichla sibirica* (0, 9, 1) *Very rare, last in 2014*

Fair Isle Hoini and Steensi Geo, 1CY male, 5th October (H. J. Fearn, L. V. Gregory) (fig. 10).

The second for Fair Isle, but much less obliging than the first, also a first-winter male on the island's west cliffs, on 25th September 2008.

(Breeds C & E Siberia from Yenisey & Lena Rivers, S to NE Mongolia, & E to NE China, Amurland, Sakhalin, & N Japan. Winters C Burma, Indochina & Thailand S to Singapore, Sumatra & Java.)


1st winter ♂ Siberian Thrush, Hoini 5/10/2015
Blue stripe along underwing bordered by gleaming white stripes
Bill dark
Concolourous dark blue plumage - no obvious supercilium or belly patch noted in the brief sighting.

Lee Gregory

Fig. 10. First-winter (1CY) male Siberian Thrush *Geokichla sibirica*, Fair Isle, October 2015.

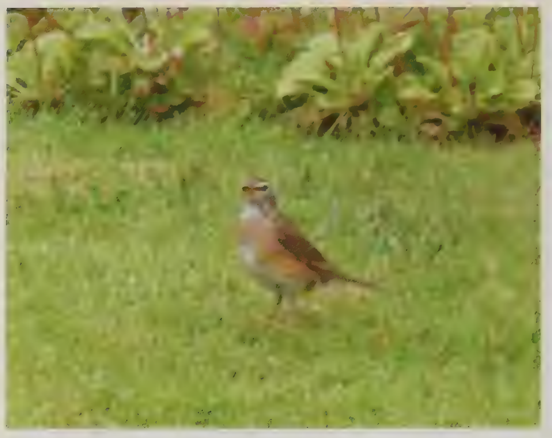
Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus* (0, 21, 1) *Rare, about one every two years*

Shetland Symbister, Whalsay, 2CY female, 20th June, photo (C. & J. Simpson per J. L. Irvine) (plate 339).

This top-quality Asian vagrant could so easily have gone unnoticed. It was seen and photographed by the Simpsons in their garden on Whalsay. They were unsure what it was but, after showing their photos to local birders, the identification was fairly straightforward; unfortunately, seeing the bird wasn't…

Spring records of Asian thrushes are genuinely rare, and this is only the fourth spring Eyebrowed in Britain, following others at Aldbrough, Yorkshire, on 16th–23rd April 1981; Newburgh, North-east Scotland, on 27th May 1981; and Auchmithie, Angus & Dundee, on 28th–30th May 1995. Autumn birds invariably arrive with large influxes of Redwings *T. iliacus*, yet spring birds have occurred mostly after the departure of wintering Redwings. Could these birds be overshooting spring migrants (they normally arrive on their breeding grounds between mid May and early June) rather than birds which have overwintered in western Europe?

Islands feature prominently among the British records of Eyebrowed Thrush. This is the fourth for Shetland/Fair Isle, while there are three from Orkney and two from the Outer Hebrides. Scilly has an impressive score of seven, although none since 1993, which was when the


Carolyn Simpson

339. First-summer (2CY) female Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*, Whalsay, Shetland, June 2015.

last English record occurred. The only other English records were in Yorkshire (above) and Northamptonshire. Continuing the island theme, the only Welsh record was on Bardsey, Caernarfonshire, on 12th October 1999.

(Breeds Siberia from Yenisey River E to Sea of Okhotsk & Kamchatka, & S to Lake Baikal, N Mongolia & Amurland. Winters S China, Taiwan, Indochina & Thailand S to Singapore, Sumatra, Philippines & N Borneo.)

Thrush Nightingale *Luscinia luscinia* (1, 205, 3) *About 4–5 per year; stable or decreasing*

Fair Isle Setter, 1CY, 19th August, photo (C. R. Hatsell *et al.*).
Northumberland Brownsman, Farne Islands, 1CY, 15th–16th August, trapped, photo (D. Roche *et al.*).
Yorkshire Thorne Moors, 1CY, 24th August, trapped, photo (B. Baxter, J. Hinchliffe, B. P. Wainwright).

(Breeds C & E Europe from S Scandinavia & Baltic countries to Romania & Ukraine, & E through temperate Russia to S Siberia. Winters E Africa, from S Kenya to Zimbabwe.)

Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* (0, 11, 1) *Rare, about one every three years, recent increase*

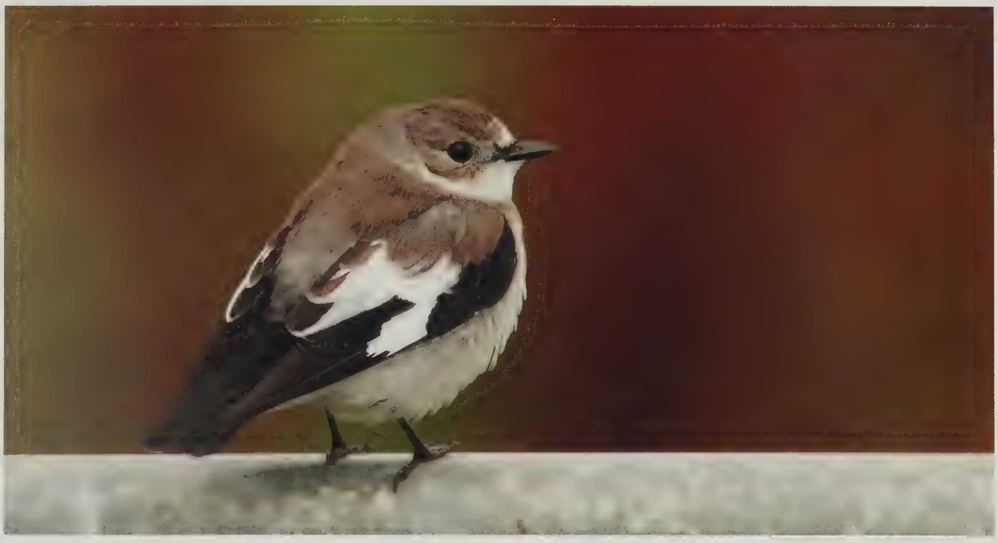
Fair Isle Hill Dyke, 1CY female, 20th October, photo (C. R. Hatsell *et al.*).

(Breeds European foothills of Ural Mountains, & Siberia from Ob River E to Anadyr & Kamchatka, & S to N Mongolia, Ussuriland, NE Hokkaido & NE China, also isolated population on E slopes of Tibetan Plateau. Winters from Nepal E through Himalayan foothills to NE India, Burma & N Indochina to C Thailand, S China & Taiwan.)

Red-flanked Bluetail *Tarsiger cyanurus* (2, 136, 17) *About five per year, influx 2010 (31); recent increase*

Caernarfonshire Bardsey, female or 1CY male, 25th October, photo (S. D. Stansfield, S. Walton).
Fair Isle Troila Geo, female or 1CY male, 11th October, photo (D. Parnaby *et al.*).
Isles of Scilly Covean, St Agnes, female or 1CY male, 11th–16th October, photo (D. Page *et al.*). Lower Town, St Agnes, female or 1CY male, 18th–19th October, photo (G. K. Gordon *et al.*).
Kent Sandwich Bay, 1CY male, 20th–31st October, trapped, photo (M. Himsworth, I. D. Hunter).
Lincolnshire Gibraltar Point, 1CY female, 20th October, trapped, photo (G. Gregory *et al.*).
Norfolk Weybourne, 1CY+ female, 11th October, trapped, photo (M. D. & M. J. Preston *et al.*). Holkham Pines, female or 1CY male, 12th–19th October, photo (per birding information services). Wells Woods, 1CY, 16th–20th October, sound recording, photo (A. J. Saunders *et al.*). Hemsby, 1CY, 17th–18th October (T. E. Allwood, R. J. Irvine, B. Jarvis).
Northumberland Low Newton-by-the-Sea, female or 1CY male, 16th October (B. J. Steel).
Orkney Noup Head, Westray, female or 1CY male, 5th October, photo (R. B. Wynn). Sandside Bay, Deerness, Mainland, female or 1CY male, 12th October, photo (C. Reid, D. Short *et al.*).
Shetland Whitefield, Whalsay, female or 1CY male, 22nd September (J. L. Irvine). Kergord, Mainland, 1CY male, 16th–17th October, photo (C. Fentiman, T. J. Wilson *et al.*).
Yorkshire Spurn, 1CY, 12th–13th October, photo (T. D. Jones *et al.*). Flatmere, Flamborough, female or 1CY male, 12th October, photo (C. C. Thomas *et al.*), presumed same South Landing, Flamborough, 13th–16th October (R. Barnes *et al.*).

(Breeds NE Finland E through boreal forests of N Russia & Siberia to Kamchatka, N Japan & NE China. Winters S China, Taiwan & S Japan through SE Asia to N peninsular Thailand.)



Steve Arlow

340. Adult (2CY+) male Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis*, Sumburgh, Shetland, September 2015.

Collared Flycatcher *Ficedula albicollis* (1, 44, 1) *Rare, about one per year; stable or increasing*

Shetland Sumburgh Head, Mainland, 2CY+ male, 21st September, photo (P. M. Ellis *et al.*) (*Brit Birds* 108: plate 412; plate 340).

(Breeds E France, S Germany, Italy & Baltic islands of Gotland & Öland, E through C & E Europe to European Russia W of Urals. Winters E & C Africa, from Tanzania to Zimbabwe.)

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Central Asian races, 'Eastern Black Redstart' *P. o. phoenicuroides/ rufiventris/xerophilus* (0, 6, 0) *Very rare, last in 2011 (two), 2014 (two)*

Isles of Scilly Carn Thomas, St Mary's, 1CY male, 30th November 2014 to 12th January, photo (see also *Brit. Birds* 108: 618–619).

2014 Yorkshire Scalby, 1CY male, 29th November to 3rd December, photo (*Brit. Birds* 108: 618–619); note revised location.

(Race *phoenicuroides* breeds Russian Altai & N Mongolia, S through mountains of C Asia & NW China to NW Himalayas & W Tibet; intergrades with races *rufiventris* and *xerophilus* in mountains of W China and Tibetan Plateau. Winters NE Africa, Arabian Peninsula, Iran & Pakistan to W & C India.)

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus* (1, 382, 5) *About ten per year; decreasing*

Hampshire Hook-with-Warsash, female or 1CY male, 23rd–24th October, photo (D. Gorman, R. H. Marchant, M. Palmer *et al.*).

Norfolk Caister-on-Sea, 1CY+ male, 21st–25th October, photo (G. R. Oxborough *et al.*).

Shetland Quendale, Mainland, female or 1CY male, 12th–15th October, photo (D. Houghton *et al.*).

Suffolk Orfordness, female or 1CY male *S. m. maurus*, 10th October, trapped, photo, DNA analysis (M. C. Marsh *et al.*).

Yorkshire Flamborough Head, 1CY male, 14th–20th October, photo (L. C. Johnson *et al.*).

1990 Norfolk Salthouse, 1CY male, 26th September, photo (A. M. Stoddart *et al.*).

(Race *maurus* breeds Russia & W Siberia E to Yenisey River and region of Irkutsk, NW Mongolia & N China, S to Tien Shan Mountains, Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. Winters Iran to N India. Race *stejnegeri* breeds east of *maurus* to Pacific coast of Amurland, S to N Mongolia, NE China, Sakhalin, Hokkaido & N Honshu. Winters NE India & China S of Yangtze, S to Malay Peninsula, Taiwan, Philippines & Borneo. Race *variegatus* breeds W & N Caspian Sea from Azerbaijan & Georgia, to lower reaches of Volga & Ural Rivers. Migrates SW to winter E Iraq, Arabian Peninsula, & Israel to N & E Sudan, N Ethiopia & Eritrea. Other races occur in Caucasus region, Himalayas & W China.)

Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina* (1, 32, 1) *Rare, about one per year; stable*

Isles of Scilly Airfield, St Mary's, 1CY+, 8th October, photo (W. J. Scott, K. Webb *et al.*).

(Breeds Black Sea coast from E Greece N to Ukraine & SW Russia, & E from Turkey through Kazakhstan & Mongolia to N China, S to Iran & N Pakistan. Winters Africa from N Sahel zone to E Africa, & Middle East to S Iran, Pakistan & NW India.)

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* (9, 133, 2) *About four per year; increasing*

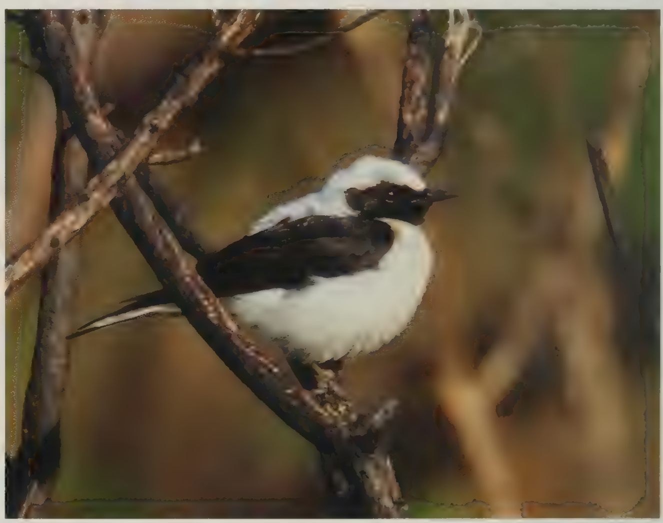
Cumbria Tarn Bay, Eskmeals, 2CY+ male, 16th–19th November, photo (D. Shackleton *et al.*).
Isles of Scilly Porth Askin, St Agnes, 2CY male, 21st–26th March, photo (R. J. G. Dawson *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 108: plate 171).
2014 Norfolk Gorleston-on-Sea and Great Yarmouth, 1CY female, 7th–14th November, photo (*Brit. Birds* 108: 621); note revised location.
2011 Cornwall Porthgwarra, then Nanjizal, 1CY+ male, 6th–10th November, photo (J. Lawson, D. Parker, E. Thompson *et al.*). Porthgwarra, 1CY+ female, 18th–22nd November, photo (D. Lewis *et al.* per Cornwall Recorder).

(Breeds desert regions of N Africa from Morocco to Middle East, N to S Caucasus, & C Asia from C Iran & N Pakistan to Mongolia & N China. Some N African birds resident, but most winter Sahara & Sahel region of N Africa from Mauritania E to Ethiopia & Somalia. Asian breeders winter Arabian Peninsula to NW India.)

Black-eared Wheatear *Oenanthe hispanica* (11, 47, 1) *Rare, about one per year; recent decrease*

Hampshire Acres Down, New Forest, 2CY+ male *O. h. melanoleuca*, 13th June, photo (J. Burge, G. N. Howard *et al.*) (plate 341).

(Mediterranean basin; nominate race breeds NW Africa & Iberia, E to France & N Italy, eastern race *melanoleuca* breeds S Italy to Greece, & SW Asia from Turkey to S Caucasus, S to Israel & SW Iran. Winters N tropical Africa from Senegal & N Nigeria to Ethiopia & Eritrea.)


Steve Gantlett

341. Male 'Eastern Black-eared Wheatear' *Oenanthe hispanica melanoleuca*, Acres Down, New Forest, Hampshire, June 2015.

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* (2, 69, 4) *About two per year; stable*

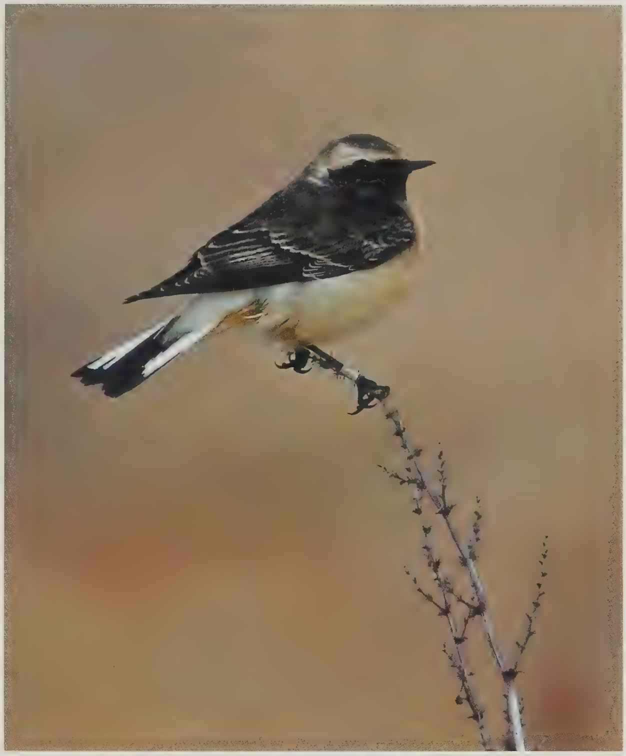
Cornwall Botallack, 1CY male, 17th October, photo (A. Davey).
Shetland Norwick, Unst, female or 1CY male, 14th October, photo (D. Fairhurst, M. A. Maher *et al.*).
Suffolk Landguard Point, 2CY+ male, 2nd–3rd November, trapped, photo (W. Brame, N. Odin, C. Ryde *et al.*) (plate 342).
Yorkshire Spurn, 1CY male, 3rd October, photo (R. Scally *et al.*).

It was perhaps no surprise that Shetland and Yorkshire weighed in with their eighth and seventh records of Pied Wheatear respectively in 2015; these counties are second and third only to Norfolk, with 12 accepted records. In contrast, the adult male at Landguard was only the third for Suffolk, while the first-winter male at Botallack was the second for Cornwall. The Shetland bird was the second for Unst and found only a short distance from the first, in November 2014.

Separation of female and first-winter birds from 'Eastern Black-eared Wheatear' *O. hispanica melanoleuca* can be problematic, and it can be difficult to see the cold, paler-fringed upperparts of Pied on a distant bird. This feature and the primary projection being equal to or longer than the exposed tertials are perhaps the two most reliable pointers to Pied.

The great majority (over 85%) of all records have been found during the past 30 years; during that period, the only blank years were 1995 and 2005, while six in 2003 remains the best annual total. October is the month to connect with Pied Wheatear, accounting for two-thirds of all records. There are just two spring records, one at Winterton, Norfolk, on 28th May 1978 and another at Spurn, Yorkshire, on 20th June 1991, the latter relocating to Scarborough on 22nd–23rd June.

(Breeds E Romania & Bulgaria, E through S & E Ukraine, S Russia, S Siberia, Kazakhstan & Mongolia to N China, E to Gulf of Bohai. Winters NE & E Africa, & SW Arabian Peninsula.)



Bill Baston

342. Adult (2CY+) male Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*, Landguard, Suffolk, November 2015.

Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*

SE European & W Asian race, 'Black-headed Wagtail' *M. f. feldegg* (0, 19, 0) *Rare, about one every two years*

2014 Wiltshire Salisbury Plain, 2CY+ male, 1st–15th June (P. E. Castle, P. Combridge, G. O. Harris).

This record from 2014 was unusual among recent records in that the bird was not photographed, and on the first date was picked up on call only, with a week passing before it was first seen. However, it was fully and well described leaving no room to doubt the identification. That such a seemingly obvious bird requires such thorough documentation shows the very real difficulties in eliminating both exceptionally dark-headed 'Grey-headed Wagtails' *M. f. thunbergi* and Black-headed Wagtail intergrades. Several recent claims of this taxon, even photographed birds, have failed in this respect, and for a fuller examination of BBRC's approach to vagrant taxa from the Yellow Wagtail group see Rowlands (2016).

(Race *feldegg* breeds Balkans & Greece E through Turkey to E Kazakhstan & Afghanistan, S to Iran. Western populations winter Nigeria to Uganda & S to Congo, eastern populations winter NW India.)

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii* (1, 24, 3) *Rare, about one per year*

Isles of Scilly Peninnis Head, St Mary's, 1CY, 13th–25th October, photo (G. Haig, T. Vaughan, P. Whiteman *et al.*) (plate 343).

Norfolk Stiffkey, 1CY, 2nd–3rd October, photo (J. R. McCallum *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 109: 458).

Yorkshire Calder Wetlands, 1CY, 8th December 2014 to 6th January, sound recording, photo (see also *Brit. Birds* 108: 623–624). Spurn, 5th November, photo (M. J. Pilsworth *et al.*).

(Breeds S Transbaikalia, N Mongolia & extreme NE China. Winters locally throughout Indian subcontinent S to Sri Lanka.)

Simon Knight

343. First-winter (1CY) Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii,* St Mary's, Scilly, October 2015.

Tawny Pipit *Anthus campestris* (49, 1261, 3) *About ten per year, recent decrease*

Dorset Portland BO, 2CY+, 9th–10th May, photo (per Dorset Recorder).
Fair Isle Quoy and Houll, 2CY, 4th–19th May, photo (C. R. Hatsell, D. Parnaby, D. N. Shaw *et al.*).
Hampshire Gunner Point, Hayling Island, 1CY, 5th September, photo (P. Gammage, K. Turner *et al.*).
1982 Cornwall Predannack, 1CY+, 3rd October (A. J. Merritt, A. D. Whatley *et al.*)

(Breeds NW Africa, S & C Europe N to Netherlands & Estonia, E to NW Mongolia, NW China, N Iran & N Afghanistan. Winters S edge of Sahara from Senegal to Sudan, Arabian Peninsula & NW Indian subcontinent.)

Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi* (4, 98, 4) *About three per year; stable or increasing*

Isles of Scilly Porth Hellick, St Mary's, 1CY+, 24th September, trapped, photo (J. Askins, K. Webb *et al.*).
Orkney Peckhole, North Ronaldsay, 1CY+, 13th October, photo (M. Warren *et al.*).
Shetland Melby, Mainland, 1CY+, 22nd September, presumed same 13th October, sound recording, photo (R. Riddington, R. M. Tallack); presumed same Loch of Norby, Mainland, 29th September to 2nd October, photo (W. T. S. Miles, R. M. Tallack *et al.*) (plate 344). Hametoun, Foula, 1CY+, 10th October, photo (P. V. Harvey, M. A. Maher, R. Riddington, B. H. Thomason).

Records of Pechora Pipits, like those of a number of other Siberian specialities, are becoming more regular: 84% of the total is accounted for in the last 30 years, while the last blank year was 2010, and before that 2000. Yet this is still a highly prized rarity away from Shetland (Shetland and Fair Isle combined account for 88 of the 106 records). The Scilly bird represents the second for the islands and the 13th away from the Northern Isles (and just five of those were in Orkney, all on North Ronaldsay). East Anglia and southeast England are eagerly awaiting their first. Elsewhere in northwest Europe it is extremely rare, with only Norway amassing a double-figure total (37 records), followed by four from the Faeroe

Peter Garrity

344. Pechora Pipit *Anthus gustavi*, Loch of Norby, Shetland, October 2015.

Islands, three from France and singles from Finland, Germany, Iceland and Sweden.

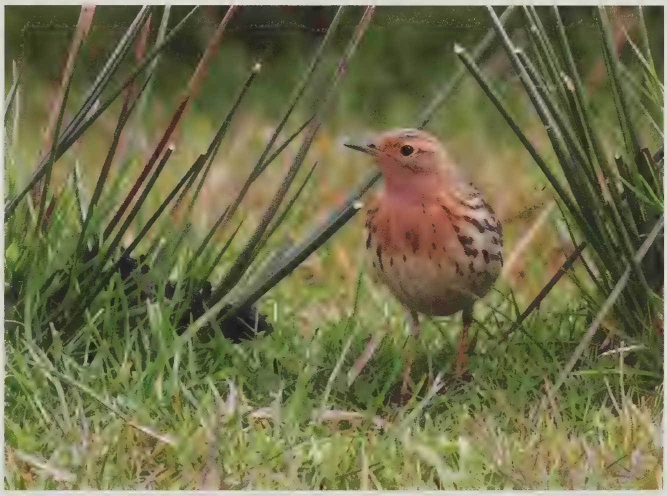
(Breeds scrub-tundra & taiga of subarctic Eurasia, from Pechora region of NE Russia E to Chukotskiy Peninsula & Kamchatka. Migrates through E China & Taiwan to wintering areas in Philippines, N Borneo & N Sulawesi. Isolated race, *menzbieri*, breeds NE China & Amur River region of SE Russia.)

Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* (13, 517, 6) *About ten per year; decreasing*

Avon Pilning Wetlands, Northwick Warth, 2CY+, 3rd–4th October, photo (B. Lancastle, C. J. Vines *et al.*).
Cleveland Seaton Common, 2CY male, 10th–12th May, photo (C. Dodsworth *et al.*).
Derbyshire Ludworth Moor, Chisworth, 2CY+ male, 3rd–4th May, photo (J. Rayner *et al.*) (plate 345); also seen Greater Manchester.
Greater Manchester Ludworth Moor, 2CY+ male, 3rd–4th May, photo (per Greater Manchester Recorder); also seen Derbyshire.
Isle of May Rona, 1CY+, 6th October, photo (D. Steel).
Isles of Scilly Airfield, St Mary's, 1CY+, 4th–6th October, photo (J. Almond, J. Headon *et al.*). Airfield then Peninnis, St Mary's, 1CY+, 12th–14th October, photo (J. F. C. Judge, N. Slater, T. Vaughan *et al.*), presumed same Heliport, Tresco, 18th October, photo (S. J. Broyd, R. Hibbett).
1999 Isles of Scilly Salakee, 1CY+, 12th October (A. Brue, M. S. Scott *et al.*)

Red-throated Pipit was removed from the BBRC list at the end of 2005. In that year's BBRC report, D. I. M. Wallace wrote: 'Ominously, since 2001 the bird has seemingly struggled to reach us. The recent average of seven a year represents a 60% decrease on the previous decade and is the same as that from 1950 to 1985. Astonishingly, there was no spring bird in 2005.' Thus, even as it was removed from the list of national rarities, its likely return was heralded.

The increase in records between 1950 and 1979 seemed a genuine reflection of increasing observer effort


David Aitkin

345. Male Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus*, Ludworth Moor, Derbyshire, May 2015.

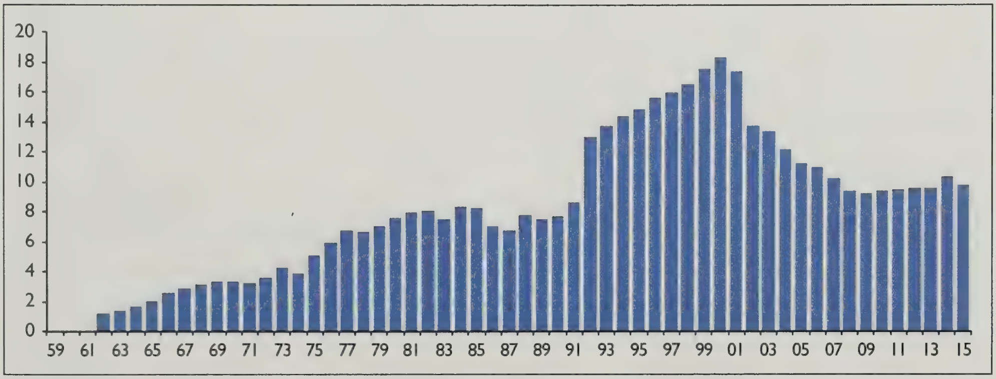


Fig. 11. Rolling ten-year means of the numbers of Red-throated Pipits *Anthus cervinus* in Britain – hence the value of 9.8 for 2015 is the mean for the ten-year period 2006–15 inclusive. This shows the steady increase in numbers seen in Britain to around 2000, with a subsequent decline.

(fig. 11). Over the last 30 years, however, numbers have fluctuated wildly, between a low of two in 1986 to the extraordinary 47 in 1992. These fluctuations are hard to explain. Red-throated Pipit is a common bird over its vast range and its population is thought to be stable.

Calling 'fly-overs' continue to cause much debate. Such records can still be considered acceptable provided they meet our criteria, as stated on the BBRC website: the diagnostic call must be heard at least three times and described well enough (or preferably sound-recorded) to eliminate similar species. Additionally, we must be convinced that the call has emanated from a small pipit, thus ruling out the real possibility of hearing one species while seeing another.

(Breeds N Norway, N Sweden & N Finland then E across N Russia to Chukotskiy Peninsula & S to Kamchatka, with small numbers W Alaska. Winters across N & C equatorial Africa, N Indian subcontinent, S China & SE Asia.)

Arctic Redpoll *Acanthis hornemanni*

North Holarctic race, 'Coues's Redpoll' *A. h. exilipes* (12, 140, 1) *About 4–5 per year*

Norfolk Hempstead, Eccles-on-Sea, 1CY+, 13th December into 2016, photo (T. E. Allwood, A. J. Kane, A. M. Stoddart *et al.*).

Arctic Redpoll was relinquished by BBRC in the great cull of 2006, but the nominate race *hornemanni*, from Greenland and northeast Canada, was retained as a rarity. It has become increasingly apparent, however, that the continental race *exilipes* should also be a rarity in its own right, since it has remained stubbornly rare. Indeed, recent statistics from the Scarce Migrants reports show that it is currently rarer than Two-barred Crossbill! Although *exilipes* is subject to occasional exceptional influxes, it was a straightforward decision to reinstate the taxon to the BBRC list. In a situation similar to that of the Subalpine Warbler, both Arctic Redpoll taxa are now national rarities in their own right, but the species as a whole remains just outside the numerical threshold for BBRC. Consequently, all submissions to BBRC must be allocated to either *hornemanni* or *exilipes*, while those records which are indeterminate should be submitted to the relevant county recorder for local assessment.

(Breeds tundra zone of N Eurasia, Alaska & N Canada, from N Scandinavia E through N Russia to Chukotskiy Peninsula, & N Alaska E to Hudson Bay. Disperses erratically to S of breeding range in winter, depending on birch *Betula* crop, some regularly reach NW Europe.)

Two-barred Crossbill *Loxia leucoptera* (73, 297, 1) *About nine per year, influxes 2008 (59), 2013 (101); increasing*

Borders Berry Bush, Crosslee, 3CY+ male, 10th March, photo (R. A. Bramhall).

Gloucestershire Woorgreens, Brierley, 3CY+ male, 15th February to 25th March, photo (M. Dowie, T. Mabbett, L. Thomson *et al.*), presumed same as Gloucestershire 2014, see below.

2014 Gloucestershire Woorgreens, Brierley, 2CY+ male, 2nd May (R. Husbands), presumed same 17th May (D. Dine, M. Downie, S. Owen, I. Ralphs), and 26th October (R. Husbands); presumed same as Gloucestershire 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 625).

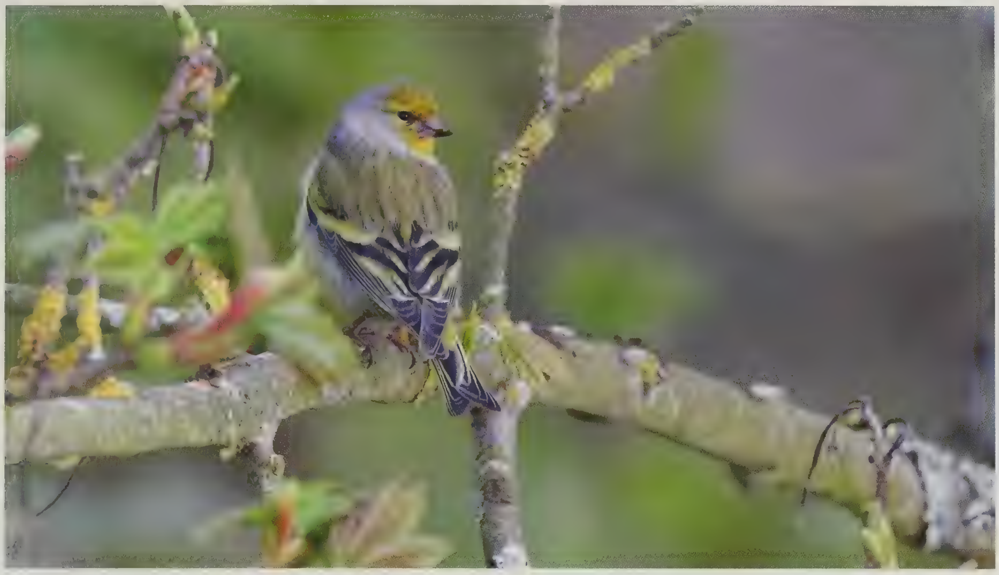
2014 Norfolk Furze Heath, two 2CY males and one 2CY female, 16th February to 12th April (P. Feakes, N. Williams *et al.*), presumed same High Ash Hill, 5th–8th March, photo (P. J. Dolton, L. Gregory, A. J. Hale), and Lynford Arboretum, 22nd March to 20th April, two males to 24th May, one to 25th, photo (per Norfolk Recorder); presumed same as Norfolk 2013 (*Brit. Birds* 107: 642–644).

(Palearctic race *bifasciata* breeds larch *Larix* forests of N Eurasia from N Scandinavia to E Siberia, reaching Sea of Okhotsk & S to Baikal region. Outside breeding season occasionally disperses as far as NW Europe. Nominate race *leucoptera* breeds across N North America.)

Citril Finch *Carduelis citrinella* (0, 1, 1) *Extremely rare, previous record in 2008*

Norfolk Burnham Overy Dunes, 3CY+ male, 10th–11th May, photo (M. A. Nash *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 108: plate 228; plate 346).

Norfolk's Citril Finch was an early-morning find, and it remained twitchable throughout its first day, presenting many birders with an easy opportunity to catch up with this handsome species in



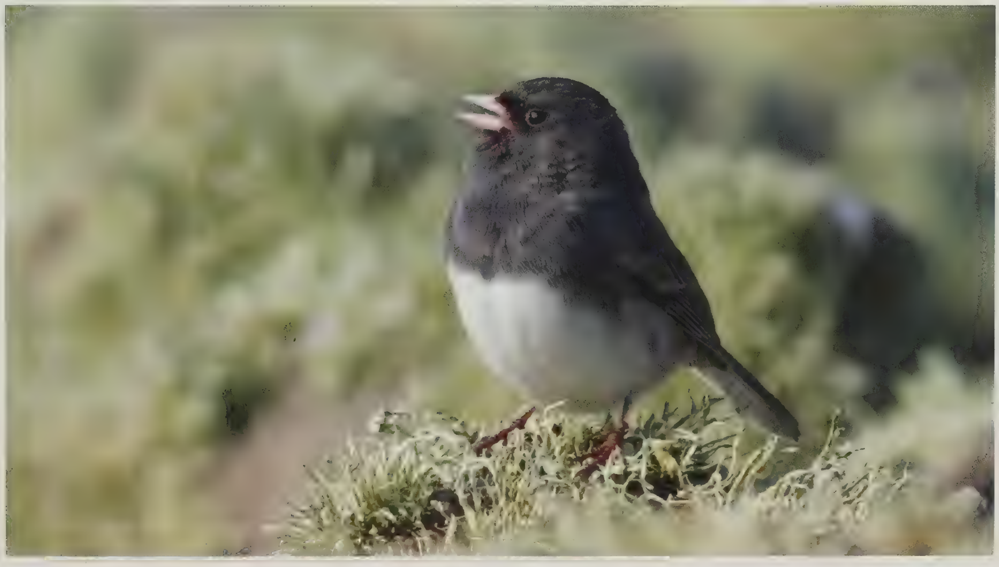
346. Adult (3CY+) male Citril Finch *Carduelis citrinella*, Burnham Overy Dunes, Norfolk, May 2015.

Britain. The only previous British record involved a male on Fair Isle on 6th–11th June 2008 (*Brit. Birds* 103: 628–629). At first sight this alpine species seems an unlikely vagrant, yet in fact its propensity for dispersal is well documented: Citril Finches have now been recorded at a dozen sites around the coasts of northwest Europe. That the Norfolk bird arrived the day before and just 15 km west of a Moltoni's Warbler supports the contention that it originated from the Alps rather than the Pyrenees.

(Breeds mountain ranges in C Spain, Pyrenees, & Alps N to S Germany & E to N Slovenia. Largely sedentary although some descend from higher elevations outside the breeding season.)

Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis* (0, 38, 1) *Rare, about one per year; stable or increasing*

Shetland Toab, Mainland, 2CY male in song, 11th May, photo (D. Robertson *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 108: plate 229; plate 347).



347. First-winter (2CY) male Dark-eyed Junco *Junco hyemalis*, Toab, Shetland, May 2015.

(Breeds North America from N Alaska & N Canada, S to S California, N Texas & N Georgia. British records of forms previously recognised as Slate-coloured Junco, breeding throughout N & E of range, S to Georgia. Northern populations migratory, wintering to S of breeding range.)

Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia* (0, 5, 1) *Very rare, last in 2008, 2014*

Caernarfonshire Bardsey, 2CY+ male in song, 10th–20th June, photo (E. Lewis, S. D. Stansfield *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 108: plate 281; plate 348).

(Breeds SE Europe & SW Asia from Albania & S Greece through S Turkey & Cyprus to N Israel & W Jordan. Winters NE Africa.)

Michael McKee

348. Male Cretzschmar's Bunting *Emberiza caesia*, Bardsey, Caernarfonshire, June 2015.

Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* (21, 512, 10) *About ten per year; decreasing*

Devon Lundy, 1CY+, 27th September to 1st October, trapped, photo (J. Horton *et al.* per Devon Recorder).

Fair Isle Utra, 2CY female, 19th May, photo (C. R. Hatsell *et al.*).

Lincolnshire Gibraltar Point, 1CY+ male, 11th October, photo (M. Swannell, A. Temple, K. M. Wilson *et al.*).

Orkney Ancum, North Ronaldsay, 2CY male in song, 20th–30th May, photo (M. Warren *et al.*). Deerness, Mainland, 1CY+, 10th October, photo (A. J. Leitch *et al.*).

Shetland Baltasound, Unst, 3CY+, 27th–29th May, photo (D. & J. F. Cooper *et al.*). Sumburgh, Mainland, 2CY male, 21st June, photo (M. S. Chapman). Hametoun Burn, Foula, 1CY+, 20th–23rd September, photo (T. Sykes) (plate 349). Gorie, Bressay, 1CY+, 24th September, photo (W. C. Aspin). Seafield, Yell, 1CY, 13th October, photo (D. Preston per Shetland Recorder).

1978 Orkney North Ronaldsay, 1CY, 29th September, trapped (*Brit. Birds* 73: 529); note revised year, previously given as 1979.

The return of Rustic Bunting to this report has been anticipated for a while, and this year's total of ten is just above average for recent years. In hindsight, the species' removal from the BBRC list from 2006 only really came about after an isolated run of very good years in the 1990s: four of the six best annual totals were during 1993–98, including 47 in 1993, 39 in 1998 and 23 in 1996. No other annual totals are above 20.

This year's batch of four in spring and six in autumn is roughly in line with the overall proportion of spring/autumn records. There have also been a few winter discoveries: in Greater London in February–March 1993, Cambridgeshire in January–March 1994 and Wiltshire in January 2004. In China, Rustic Buntings leave the wintering grounds in March, and arrivals reach Sweden from late April onwards, so records here in March and April, most recently in Hampshire in March 2010, may relate to birds already on the move in spring. Most spring Rustics are found between mid May and mid June but very few arrive in late June. There are no July records and the only one in August concerned a moulting adult female in Shetland in 2014; found on 5th August, it remained on Unst until 14th October. Most autumn records are in mid September or October, with a few stragglers in November.

Tim Sykes

349. Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica*, Foula, Shetland, September 2015.

The Northern Isles account for the majority of records, although Scilly also has a good total and there are a number of records from most of the east-coast counties. Rustic Buntings are still very rare birds anywhere else, however, and anyone lucky enough to find one, even in Shetland, will be pleased to see the species returned to the list of 'official' rares.

(Breeds N Eurasia from Sweden & Finland, E across N Russia to E Siberia & Kamchatka, & S to Baikal region. Migrates SE to winter E China, Korean Peninsula & S Japan.)

Black-headed Bunting *Emberiza melanocephala* (6, 208, 2) *About five per year; stable or decreasing*

Pembrokeshire Skomer, 2CY+ male, 7th–8th June, photo (F. McKinnon, S. Riedlinger *et al.*), presumed same Saundersfoot, 10th June, photo (per birding information services). St Justinian's, St Davids, 2CY+ male, 29th June, photo (C. & W. Williams).

(Breeds C Italy to Greece, Turkey, N Iraq, W Iran, & N through Caucasus to Ukraine & S Russia. Winters W & C India.)

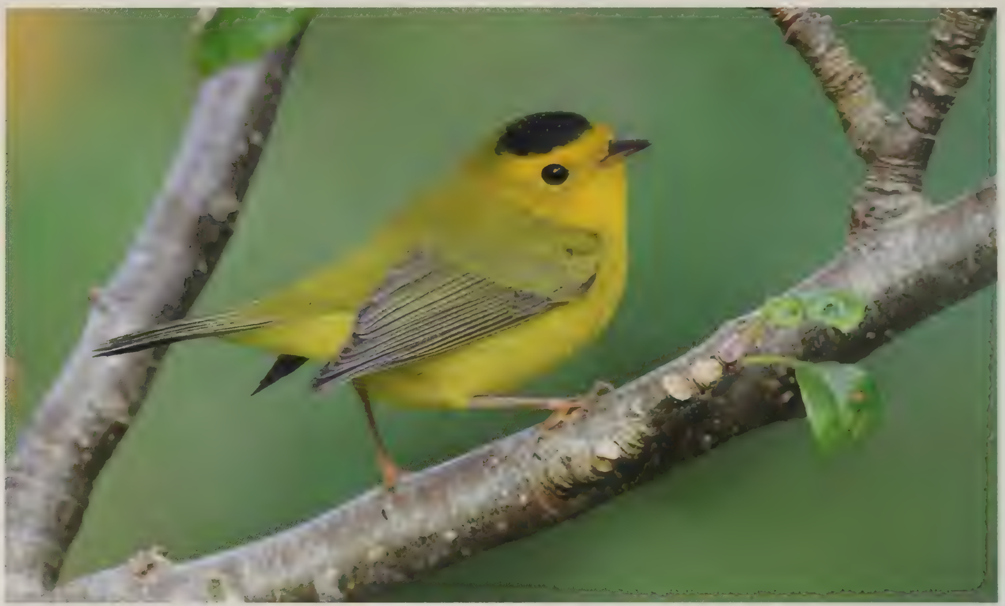
Blackpoll Warbler *Setophaga striata* (0, 46, 1) *Rare, about one per year; stable*

Isles of Scilly St Warna's Cove, St Agnes, 1CY+, 23rd September, photo (R. J. G. Dawson, D. & E. Price *et al.*) (plate 350).
2014 Yorkshire Easington, 1CY, 2nd November, photo (J. M. Turton *et al.*).

(Breeds North America from W Alaska E throughout Canada to Newfoundland, & S to Maine, USA. Migrates through E USA to winter NE South America.)

Elisabeth Price

350. Blackpoll Warbler *Setophaga striata*, St Warna's Cove, St Agnes, Scilly, September 2015.



351. Male Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla*, Port of Ness, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, October 2015.

Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla* (0, 1, 1) *Extremely rare, previous record in 1985*

Outer Hebrides Port of Ness, Lewis, 1CY+ male, 13th–17th October, photo (R. H. Dennis, B. A. E. Marr *et al.*) (*Brit. Birds* 108: plate 437; plate 351).

The Wilson's Warbler at Rame Head, Cornwall, on 13th October 1985 has long been etched into the minds of British birders. The wonderful account of its discovery, and in particular the accompanying – rather fuzzy but undeniably gripping – photographs, clearly identify it as a stunning male, the stuff of birding legend. It was present for just one day, and only about ten local birders managed to see it.

Exactly 30 years later, the second was discovered by two stalwarts of British birding, Tony Marr and Roy Dennis. Although it was found at the opposite end of the country, other circumstances were clearly an echo of the first, in particular the fact that this bird was also a very smart male. The improvement in communication technology in the intervening period meant that the news spread quickly and birders from the neighbouring island of Harris had seen it by the end of the day. And unlike the first, this bird not only stayed for five days but also gradually became easier to see as the many stunning photographs testify.

Three races are generally recognised, differing in size and brightness of plumage, but it was not possible to assign the Lewis bird to any particular one.

(Breeds N Alaska S to S California, N New Mexico, N Minnesota and Maine, USA, and N Yukon E to Newfoundland, Canada. Winters S USA, Mexico and C America S to Costa Rica and W Panama.)

Appendix 1. Records of former BBRC species, removed from the list prior to 2015

Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* (163, 447, –) [statistics to end of 2001]

1998 Orkney Loch of Grameshall, Mainland, 3CY+, 19th–20th May (K. E. Hague, E. J. & S. J. Williams *et al.*).

(Widespread but local throughout Mediterranean basin & N to France, Belgium & occasionally Netherlands. Elsewhere, breeds Morocco, Ukraine, Turkey & throughout Indian subcontinent & SE Asia N to Japan, & locally throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Widespread North & South America.)

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* (149, 367, –) [statistics to end of 1990]

1987 Lincolnshire Saltfleet, four 1CY+, 19th August, photo (M. J. Tarrant).

(Breeds NW Africa & Mediterranean Europe, N to C France & N Ukraine, occasionally N to S Sweden & the Netherlands, E through C Asia to E Kazakhstan. Winters throughout sub-Saharan Africa, & locally India S to Sri Lanka, and S Arabian Peninsula.)

Blyth's Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus dumetorum* (9, 186, –) [statistics to end of 2014]

2014 Highland Fettes, Kilcoy, 2CY+ male in song, 31st May, sound recording (D. & R. Butterfield, A. McNee).
2014 Lincolnshire Gibraltar Point, 1CY+, 5th–6th September (J. P. Siddle, K. M. Wilson *et al.*).
2014 North-east Scotland Girdle Ness, Aberdeen, 2CY+ male in song, 31st May, sound recording, photo (M. Lewis, A. J. Whitehouse).

(Breeds S Finland, Baltic countries & European Russia E through C Siberia to Lake Baikal & upper Lena River, & S through W Mongolia & NW China, Kazakhstan & Tajikistan to N Pakistan. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent S to Sri Lanka & E to NW Burma.)

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* (0, 318, –) [statistics to end of 2014]

1964 Suffolk Minsmere RSPB, 1CY, 17th October to 14th November, trapped, previously accepted but now considered not proven following a review (*Brit. Birds* 58: 368).
For further details, see Rowlands (2016).

(Breeds Baltic countries, S Finland, Belarus, Ukraine & S Russia, E across N Siberia to Taimyr Peninsula & S to C Siberia; also C & E Turkey E to Kazakhstan, Mongolia & N China. Black-backed race *calcarata* breeds C Asia to Tibetan Plateau. Winters throughout Indian subcontinent, S China & SE Asia to peninsular Thailand.)

Little Bunting *Emberiza pusilla* (0, 557, –) [statistics to end of 1993]

1992 Hampshire Titchfield Haven, 2CY+, 16th February to 17th April, photo (P. M. Potts *et al.*).
1986 Hampshire Winnall Moors, 2CY+, 18th–19th March, trapped, photo (C. R. Cuthbert *et al.*).

(Breeds N Eurasia from N Norway to the Chukotskiy Peninsula & Sea of Okhotsk in E Siberia. Winters NE India to S China, S to N Thailand & N Indochina.)

Appendix 2. Records where identification accepted, but placed in Category D (see *Ibis* 136: 253)

Ross's Goose *Anser rossii*

Clyde Carstairs Junction, 3CY+, 12th–14th December, photo (S. Black, A. Campbell, J. N. Darroch), presumed same as Lothian 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 628); also seen Upper Forth, Northumberland.
Northumberland West Chevington area, 3CY+, 24th January to 8th March, photo (D. & R. Dack *et al.*), presumed same as Lothian 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 628); also seen Clyde, Upper Forth.
Upper Forth Tullibody, 3CY+, 11th–24th March, photo (per birding information services), presumed same as Lothian 2014 (*Brit. Birds* 108: 628); also seen Clyde, Northumberland.
2003 North-east Scotland Meikle Loch, Aberdeenshire, 2CY+, 23rd September to 2nd October, photo (P. Shepherd *et al.*).

(Breeds on tundra of Canadian Arctic, from Perry River region of Northwest Territories to N Manitoba, including Southampton Island, E to N Ontario. Most migrate across C USA to wintering grounds in S USA. Numbers increasing on Atlantic seaboard of USA & N Mexico.)

Falcated Duck *Anas falcata*

2013 Hampshire Bury Marsh, 2CY+ male, 9th February (P. Combridge).

(Breeds E Siberia from Yenisey River & Baikal region E to Sea of Okhotsk & S to NE China & Hokkaido, Japan. Winters from S Japan to SE China, locally W to Nepal.)

Appendix 3. Records where identification accepted, but origin is uncertain or known not to be wild

Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* (9, 114, 1) *Rare, about one every 1–2 years, but status obscured by introductions*

Shetland Quendale and Fleck, Mainland, 1CY, 7th October to 5th December, colour-ringed, photo (M. Wilkinson *et al.*).

This bird was from the Swedish reintroduction programme, the offspring of wild parents caught in Russia and taken into captivity. It was released in Sweden on 8th July 2015. The wanderings of this and any such birds in the future are clearly of interest and worth recording. We are aware of similar records in recent years and welcome any belated submissions.

(Rare & declining throughout entire breeding range from N Scandinavia to NE Siberia. Reintroduction scheme in Swedish Lapland boosts numbers wintering in Netherlands. Migratory, wintering Hungary, Black & Caspian Sea areas, N Kazakhstan & lower Yangtze valley, China.)

Cackling Goose *Branta hutchinsii*

2014 Cheshire & Wirral Carr Lane Pools, Hale, 2CY+, 24th September, photo (C. & R. P. Cockbain).

(Breeds locally in Aleutian Islands, also in tundra zone of W & N coastal Alaska, USA, & N Canada from Yukon Territory to Southampton & S Baffin Islands, Nunavut; winters in USA & Mexico in three discrete regions: Washington to N California, New Mexico & NW Texas to N Mexico, & Texas Gulf coast to NE Mexico.)

Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*

Bedfordshire Priory CP, 1CY male, 29th October, ringed, photo (M. R. Alibone, S. C. Blain, D. Kramer, M. Palmer, T. Ploszajski).

(Forested regions of North America from C Alaska throughout W & C Canada to Hudson Bay, S to Montana & NE California. Winters throughout North America, from Aleutian Islands & coastal Alaska S along both seaboards to N Mexico, with small numbers wintering inland.)

Hooded Merganser *Lophodytes cucullatus*

Leicestershire & Rutland Brascote GP, 2CY+ female, 26th July (P. Asher, C. D. Baggott, C. S. Green).

(Breeds S Alaska, E across S Canada & N USA to Newfoundland, & S to Oregon, Virginia & locally almost to Gulf coast. Winters coastally, from S limit of breeding range to California & Florida.)

Great Bustard *Otis tarda*

Kent Pittswood, Hadlow, Tonbridge, 2CY+ male, 11th April, photo (W. Baker).

Since the release scheme began in Wiltshire, in 2004, determining the origin of any Great Bustard in Britain has become somewhat complicated. Any modern record is now overwhelmingly likely to refer to a wanderer from this reintroduction project, and most recent British records have been attributable to it, either by being recognised individuals or by virtue of their location. Yet the possibility of a vagrant European bird, either from a wild population or from the Brandenburg 'headstarting' project in Germany, cannot be entirely discounted. Kent is well away from the release area and well placed to receive a European bird. Historically, wild Great Bustards from the Continent have generally occurred in harsh weather in winter, while birds from the German project are also reported to move west in the same conditions. The Kent bird cannot be identified individually but the date does not fit the established vagrancy pattern and no movement of German birds was recorded at the time. The likelihood is that this bird was from the British reintroduction project, a view echoed in correspondence from the Great Bustard Group.

(Locally numerous on steppe grasslands of Iberian Peninsula, which holds over half of world population. Small, fragmented populations in E Germany, E Austria, Hungary & Balkans, E to Ukraine. Largely resident, but E European populations disperse during hard weather. To E, patchy breeding range includes S Russia, S Siberia, S Kazakhstan to Mongolia & NE China but absent from much of this range. Asian birds strongly migratory, wintering from Ukraine into SW Asia, & lower Yangtze valley, China.)

Mugimaki Flycatcher *Ficedula mugimaki*

1991 Yorkshire Stone Creek, 1CY male, 16th–17th November (*Brit. Birds* 87: 568), previously accepted as Category D but now placed in Category E after BOURC review.

(Breeds Siberia from NE Altai Mountains E to Sea of Okhotsk, S to Sakhalin, and mountains of NE China. Winters SE Asia from Thailand S to Sumatra, Java and N Borneo.)

Appendix 4. Records held until taxonomy or identification criteria are resolved (see *Brit. Birds* 108: 549)

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*

Northern Palearctic race, *F. p. calidus* and northern Nearctic race *F. p. tundrius*

Cambridgeshire Ouse Washes RSPB, 1CY, 22nd October, photo.
Lancashire & North Merseyside Ribble Estuary, 1CY, 23rd November, photo.
Lincolnshire Grimoldy Ings, 2CY, 26th–27th March, photo.

Peregrines are great wanderers and although birds from migratory high-Arctic breeding populations doubtless occur in Britain, perhaps with some regularity, accepting an individual of the Palearctic subspecies *F. p. calidus* or the Nearctic *F. p. tundrius* is likely to prove problematic. Variation among *calidus* and nominate *peregrinus* is clinal whilst the variation in 'home-grown' nominate *peregrinus* from Britain appears to be greater than generally realised. Some of the birds occurring in Britain (such as those listed here) are striking in structure and plumage and can probably be logged at least as 'northern Peregrine' (i.e. *calidus/tundrius*) but on current knowledge it is difficult to be more definitive. Biometrics or a ringing recovery would provide more compelling evidence, however.

(*F. p. calidus* breeds tundra regions of N Palearctic from N Fennoscandia E to Lena River in N Siberia, and islands N of coastal Siberia. Further E possibly intergrades with *F. p. japonensis.* Highly migratory, wintering Mediterranean basin, sub-Saharan Africa S to South Africa, Arabian Peninsula, throughout India, China, SE Asia and Indonesia, some possibly to New Guinea. *F. p. tundrius* breeds northern Alaska and northern Canada, highly migratory, wintering south to S Argentina and Chile.)

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*

Northern race, 'Northern Treecreeper' *C. f. familiaris*

2013 Lincolnshire Donna Nook, 1CY+, 14th–15th October, trapped, photo.

This subspecies seems to be quite variable: while some 'Northern Treecreepers' can appear distinctly 'frosty', less striking birds might closely resemble cleaner-looking examples of the British subspecies *C. f. britannica.* Precise identification criteria still need to be developed for this taxon, at which point it should prove possible to accept well-documented claims.

(Breeds Scandinavia N to 70°N in Norway, and Russia between c. 60°N and 51°N, E to Yenisey River. Mainly resident but some winter to S of breeding range, reaching C Europe.)

Appendix 5. Records found Not Proven

2015 Lesser White-fronted Goose Kirriereoch, Newton Stewart, Dumfries & Galloway, 22nd–23rd April. **North American Canada Goose** East Chevington, Northumberland, 13th March. Stromness Point, North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 31st May. Loch Stiapavat, Lewis, Outer Hebrides, 21st–29th June. Haroldswick, Unst, Shetland, 26th–29th May. Baltasound, Unst, Shetland, 27th–30th May. **Black Scoter** St Andrews Bay, Fife, 23rd September. **Kermadec Petrel** *Pterodroma neglecta* Pendeen, Cornwall, 25th July. **Black Stork** Southsea, Hampshire, two, 30th July. Tuddenham St Mary, Suffolk, 9th June. **Short-toed Eagle** *Circaetus gallicus* Braishfield, Romsey, Hampshire, 14th September. **Pallid Harrier** Tarbat Ness, Highland, 4th October. Melby, Mainland, Shetland, 22nd September. **Booted Eagle** *Aquila pennata* South Blackwater, Essex, 20th March. Cockley Cley, Norfolk, 22nd March. Jenny Lind Park, Norwich, Norfolk, 27th June.

Black-winged Stilt Cogden Beach, Dorset, 10th April. **Solitary Sandpiper** *Tringa solitaria* River Ebeck at Carcroft, Yorkshire, 5th February. **Lesser Yellowlegs** Wheldrake Ings, Yorkshire, 15th April. **Short-billed Dowitcher** *Limnodromus griseus* St Martin's, Isles of Scilly, 27th–28th August. **Gull-billed Tern** Three Burrows, Cornwall, 14th April. Cley, Norfolk, 12th July. **Bonaparte's Gull** Breydon Water RSPB, Norfolk, 21st May. **Ross's Gull** *Rhodostethia rosea* Applecross Bay, Highland, two, 7th December. Peterhead, North-east Scotland, 18th January to 1st February. **Laughing Gull** St Martin's, Isles of Scilly, 17th November. **Audouin's Gull** *Larus audouinii* Richmond Bank, Cheshire & Wirral, 7th March. Holland Haven and Frinton-on-Sea, Essex, 13th September. **Azorean Yellow-legged Gull** Hoveringham, Nottinghamshire, 3rd December. **American Herring Gull** Loch Caolisport, Argyll, 29th December 2014 to 4th March. Sorobaidh Bay, Tiree, Argyll, 21st January. St Just, Cornwall, 3rd May. Rufforth Airfield, Yorkshire, 11th–12th February. **Snowy Owl** Scunthorpe, Lincolnshire, 21st November. Sanday, Orkney, two, 7th–8th September. **Pallid Swift** South Gare, Cleveland, 13th November. Sizewell, Suffolk, 7th November. **Pacific Swift** *Apus pacificus* Hale, Cheshire & Wirral, 3rd June. **Little Swift** Greenan Castle, Ayrshire, 29th December. Titchfield Haven, Hampshire, 17th–18th September. Pentney Heath, Norfolk, 30th December. **Gyr Falcon** Ardclach, Moray & Nairn, 5th January. **Lesser Grey Shrike** Skegby, Nottinghamshire, 24th August. **Crag Martin** Bonchurch, Isle of Wight, 7th April. **Arctic Warbler** Garrison, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, 11th October. Peterhead, North-east Scotland, 26th–29th August. **Spectacled Warbler** *Sylvia conspicillata* Dengie Marshes, Essex, 28th August. **Western Subalpine Warbler** Baltasound, Unst, Shetland, 25th–28th May. **Paddyfield Warbler** Periglis, St Agnes, Isles of Scilly, 7th September. **Zitting Cisticola** *Cisticola juncidis* Titchwell Marsh RSPB, Norfolk, 7th May. **Northern Treecreeper** Seaton Park, North-east Scotland, 18th January. **Red-flanked Bluetail** Saxa Vord, Unst, Shetland, 14th October. **Collared Flycatcher** Kirn O'Skroo, Fair Isle, 29th September. **Isabelline Wheatear** Porth Hellick, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, 14th October. **'Ashy-headed Wagtail'** *M. f. cinereocapilla* Airfield, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, 11th October. **'Spanish Wagtail'** *M. f. iberiae* Bryher, Isles of Scilly, 4th June. **Black-headed Wagtail** Holme Marsh, Norfolk, 30th April. **Tawny Pipit** Craster, Northumberland, 13th June. **Red-throated Pipit** Carsington Water, Derbyshire, 13th November. Scatness, Mainland, Shetland, 3rd October. **Two-barred Crossbill** Lake Vyrnwy RSPB, Montgomeryshire, 20th January. **Dark-eyed Junco** Sannox, Arran, Clyde Islands, 17th October. **Pine Bunting** *Emberiza leucocephalos* Spurn, Yorkshire, 7th October. **Rock Bunting** *Emberiza cia* Holy Island, Northumberland, 27th May.

2014 North American Canada Goose North Ronaldsay, Orkney, 9th–11th October. **Short-toed Eagle** Bradwell BO, Essex, 11th June. **Pallid Harrier** Holland Haven CP, Essex, 26th–27th April. **American Herring Gull** Burry Holm, Gower, 5th January. **House Martin** *Delichon urbicum lagopodum* Whitburn CP, Co. Durham, 9th November. **Dusky Thrush** *Turdus eunomus* Oxenhope, Yorkshire, 17th October. **Spanish Wagtail** Skomer, Pembrokeshire, 15th May.

2013 Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle mandtii* Talkin Tarn, Cumbria, 20th–22nd December. **Bonaparte's Gull** Porthcressa, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly, 15th September. **Two-barred Crossbill** Saltfleetby–Theddlethorpe, Lincolnshire, 24th July. Roseisle Forest, Moray & Nairn, 6th August.

2012 Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* Hengistbury Head, Dorset, 25th October.

2011 'Steppe Buzzard' *Buteo buteo vulpinus* Sudbourne, Suffolk, 5th June to 30th August. **Semipalmated Sandpiper** Chew Valley Lake, Avon, 12th–13th September. **Yellow-breasted Bunting** *Emberiza aureola* Barnaby Lane, St Agnes, Isles of Scilly, 9th September.

2010 American Herring Gull Shawell, Lutterworth, Leicestershire & Rutland, 14th January. **Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni* Lodge Hill, Buckinghamshire, 21st September.

2009 Madeiran Storm-petrel *Oceanodroma castro* Pendeen Watch, Cornwall, 3rd September. **Long-billed Dowitcher** Loch Gruinart RSPB, Islay, Argyll, 28th–30th December.

2008 Collared Flycatcher South Gare, Cleveland, 28th–29th May.

2007 North American Canada Goose Loch of Skene, North-east Scotland, 22nd–27th October. **Bufflehead** Tetney Lock, Lincolnshire, 16th May.

2006 Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* Between Birsay and Evie, Mainland, Orkney, 23rd May.

2005 North American Canada Goose Loch Spynie, Moray & Nairn, 23rd October.

2004 Oriental Turtle Dove Loch of Harray, Mainland, Orkney, 6th–15th October. **Common Yellowthroat** *Geothlypis trichas* Maywick, Shetland, 14th October.

2000 Macaronesian Shearwater *Puffinus baroli* Gwennap Head, Porthgwarra, Cornwall, 19th August. Portland, Dorset, 25th August. Skokholm, Pembrokeshire, 27th August.

1991 Red-throated Pipit Radipole Lake RSPB, Dorset, 16th April.

1981 Siberian Stonechat Cowden, Yorkshire, 27th April.

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Conservation research news
from the
RSPB Centre for Conservation Science

giving
nature
a home

The three papers summarised here all relate to the subject of man-made toxins in the environment – and their effect on wild bird populations. Whether deliberate or incidental, the use of toxic substances can have profound and long-lasting effects on our wildlife, including some of our most iconic bird species. Thorough research has been the key to identifying, and then preventing or mitigating, the negative effects of some of these toxins over the last 50 years: the far-reaching and decades-long effects of DDT and dieldrin being prime examples. The three papers highlighted here demonstrate that the need for such research, unlike many of the birds affected by the toxins involved, is alive and well.

Egyptian Vultures and poison baits

The population of Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* in the Balkans has been declining steeply, with a decrease of over 50% reported between 2005 and 2015. This decline is much more rapid than for other populations of this species in Europe. Several potential causes have been suggested, including accidental poisoning, human disturbance to breeding birds and high mortality on the migration routes and in wintering areas. As a result, conservation management – nest guarding and/or provision of supplementary food – has been put in place in Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece, to try to increase both nest productivity and the survival of adult and immature birds. Monitoring at breeding territories before and after these measures had been put in place showed only minor positive effects, however, and no significant impact on either productivity or adult survival. Mean productivity across the population during the study was reasonably good, but adult survival during the breeding season was lower than the estimated threshold for population stability. In addition, in 35 cases where a dead adult Egyptian Vulture was found in the Balkans, and where the cause of death could be determined reliably, the majority of deaths (27, 77%) were attributable to poisoning. This suggests that poisoning is a key cause of decline in this population and that current conservation efforts are insufficient to prevent it.

Why are these birds being poisoned and by whom? The use of illegal poison baits is widespread in the Balkans, and the reasons for this are complex – it is aimed mostly at wild or feral mammalian predators of livestock, or associated with conflict between different groups (for example between hunters and shepherds). Egyptian Vultures, and other scavengers, are unintentional collateral damage in these situations. The paper by Steffen Oppel and his colleagues provides good evidence that effective resolution of the problem will require a combination of: effective implementation of the existing legislation against poison baits; measures to detect and remove poison baits from the environment; and longer-term resolution of the human conflicts involved.

Oppel, S., Dobrev, V., Arkumarev, V., Saravia, V., Bounas, A., Kret, E., Skartsi, T., Velevski, M., Stoychev, S., & Nikolov, S. C. 2016. Assessing the effectiveness of intensive conservation actions: does guarding and feeding increase productivity and survival of Egyptian Vultures in the Balkans? *Biol. Conserv.* 198: 157–164.

Veterinary drugs and vultures

Predicting the future impact of potential toxins on wildlife in the natural environment can be complex and requires an understanding of the chemistry, biochemistry, physiology and ecology involved. This is exactly what Rhys Green and his colleagues have done for the likely impacts of the drug diclofenac, recently licensed for veterinary use in Europe, on Eurasian Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus* and potentially other avian scavengers. Recent and widespread veterinary use of this non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) was identified as the sole cause of the catastrophic decline of three species of *Gyps* vulture in the Indian subcontinent during the 1990s and 2000s – all going from abundance to near extinction within a decade. The drug (used for pain relief in livestock) is extremely toxic to *Gyps* vultures, even at very low dosage, and residues within only a small fraction of all livestock carcases available to vultures were shown to be sufficient to cause the observed population crashes in Asia. There is also convincing correlational or circumstantial evidence from Asia that the severe toxicity of diclofenac extends to other vulture genera (Egyptian Vulture and Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus;* both of which have shown severe simultaneous population declines in the region) and to other avian scavengers (including Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*). For further details, see Ian Newton's recent summary on the plight of the world's vultures (*Brit. Birds* 109: 424–428).

The recent news that veterinary use of diclofenac was to be licensed in five European countries was greeted with dismay by conservationists. Of particular concern was its licence for use, in 2013, in Spain, which holds 95% of Europe's Eurasian Griffon Vultures, and where disposal of livestock carcases by making them available to wild scavengers is perfectly legal. Initial assessment by the Spanish authorities suggested that only low numbers of vultures (a few tens) were likely to be killed each year as a result of the introduction of this drug. Green *et al.* (2016) contest this conclusion, however. By combining estimates on the likely number of diclofenac-treated livestock, the likelihood of a vulture feeding on a treated carcase, and the likelihood of this resulting in vulture death, they predict that over a range of

Oscar Diez/Minden/FLPA

352. Eurasian Griffon Vultures *Gyps fulvus*, Castilla-La Mancha, Spain, November 2013.

plausible scenarios, the unregulated use of veterinary diclofenac in Spain could potentially result in the deaths of hundreds, or even thousands, of Eurasian Griffon Vultures every year – certainly enough to cause a marked population decline. Although the authors acknowledge considerable uncertainly in their predictions, the range of likely outcomes of their model gives cause for alarm and advocates the removal of diclofenac from veterinary use on livestock in Spain, and elsewhere. To see the vulture populations of Europe suffer the same fate as those of South Asia, for the same well-known and entirely avoidable reasons is surely irresponsible and negligent on the part of any authorities that allow it to happen.

Green, R. E., Donazar, J. A., Sanchez-Zapata, J. A., & Margalida, A. 2016. Potential threat to Eurasian Griffon Vultures in Spain from veterinary use of the drug diclofenac. *J. Appl. Ecol.* 53: 993–1003.

Ducks and poisoning from lead shot

Lead (the heavy metal) is a well-known toxin for humans and other animals. Yet lead ammunition is still commonly used and thousands of tonnes of spent lead gunshot are deposited irretrievably in the environment every year in the UK alone. Wild birds, especially wildfowl, can ingest lead gunshot and frequently die, or suffer sub-lethal effects, from lead poisoning. As a result, the use of lead ammunition for shooting wildfowl and/or shooting over listed wetlands in the UK is banned. However, 70% of ducks shot in England (the only UK country that monitors compliance with this law) are still shot with lead and the proportion of ducks found dead with signs of lead poisoning from ingested gunshot has not declined significantly since the ban.

But can lead poisoning result in population-level effects? Rhys Green and Debbie Pain used Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) data to analyse long-term trends in the numbers of eight duck species wintering on freshwater wetlands in the UK (Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Gadwall *A. strepera*, Eurasian Teal *A. crecca*, Mallard *A. platyrhynchos*, Pintail *A. acuta*, Shoveler *A. clypeata*, Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* and Tufted Duck *A. fuligula*). They analysed variation in wintering numbers of these species in relation to data on the prevalence of lead shot found within the gut (i.e. ingested) of dead individuals of each of these species. Data on prevalence of lead shot in dead ducks came from two datasets, one from the UK, the other from ten European countries. These were very closely correlated: if a species had high prevalence of ingested lead shot in the UK, then it was also likely to show the same across Europe. In both datasets the highest prevalence of ingested lead shot was found in Pochard and Pintail.

Species with higher prevalence of ingested lead shot were found to show more negative population trends over the period 1990/91 to 2013/14. The same relationship across species was found for analyses over a wide range of different time periods, carried out as a check. An alternative hypothesis, that population change for these species in the UK was the result of climate change affecting wintering areas on a flyway scale, was also tested and received no support from the data. The authors concluded that their analysis does indeed support the idea that ingested lead gunshot might affect population trend, which is a result of particular conservation significance for the Globally Threatened Pochard, currently undergoing a long-term population decline in the UK, and known to readily ingest lead shot.

Green, R. E., & Pain, D. J. 2016. Possible effects of ingested lead gunshot on populations of ducks wintering in the UK. *Ibis* online: **doi.org/10.1111/ibi.12400**

Compiled by Guy Anderson

Obituary

John Leonard Frederick Parslow (1935–2015)

John Parslow was a conscientious, versatile, individualistic ornithologist who at various times in his career was a keen birder (and one of the original twitchers), a bird observatory pioneer and a researcher into subjects as diverse as the use of radar to study bird migration, the status of British birds, the impact of toxic chemicals on wildlife and seabird population dynamics. He was a joint author of a bestselling field guide and became Director of Conservation and Reserves at the RSPB. Throughout his life he was a man of the times and at the forefront of many aspects of ornithology.

Born in London on 10th July 1935, John was evacuated to Cornwall at the age of six with his sister Jean, but returned to London after the war to attend Chingford Grammar School – not that he was very interested in schoolwork. He completed his National Service as a radar operator at RAF Bawdsey in 1952.

After spending his early ornithological career in the Bird Room at the British Museum, he left in 1959 to join the Edward Grey Institute in Oxford, as an assistant to David Lack. This was at the time when ground observations showed that the radiating circles appearing on radar screens (known as 'angels') were in fact Common Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* leaving their overnight roosts for their feeding grounds. He wrote several important papers correlating observed migrant bird movements, in southern and eastern England, against the radar evidence. Some of his notebooks of the time show his meticulous recording and sketching of bird movements, numbers and directions in fantastic detail and colours.

While at the EGI, John was given a two-year contract to review the changes in status among breeding birds in Britain and Ireland, using bird reports and personal communications with ornithologists. At that time (1965–66), bird populations were responding (mostly negatively) to huge perturbations in the farmed environment, mainly due to habitat changes and the effect of toxic chemicals. In many ways, this ground-breaking work was a precursor of the subsequent bird atlases undertaken by the BTO at a national level. The results of John's work were published as an eight-part series in *British Birds* in 1967–68 and I can remember, together with colleagues working at the RSPB, eagerly awaiting the arrival of each monthly instalment. That work was expanded and published as *Breeding Birds of Britain and Ireland* by Poyser in 1973. John also contributed significantly to the BOU publication *The Status of Birds in Britain and Ireland*, published in 1971. He was awarded a MiBiol from the Institute of Biology for his academic achievements relating to bird numbers and their distribution.

The knowledge and expertise gained from these efforts culminated in another ground-breaking project, this time a field guide. *The Birds of Britain and Europe with North Africa and the Middle East*, co-authored with Richard Fitter and illustrated by Herman Heinzel, first appeared in 1972. With increasing numbers of birdwatchers taking advantage of cheap package holidays to broaden their ornithological horizons, this new field guide, with its up-to-date distribution maps and increased geographical coverage, proved an instant success. It was translated into at least a dozen languages.

John was a leading light in the bird observatory movement in the 1950s and, together with like-minded folk, set up St Agnes Bird Observatory in 1957. It ran until 1967 and developed something of a cult following among birdwatchers. The trapping of birds in mist-nets was still a fairly novel technique and did not always meet with local approval. Many were the times when the nets were slashed by an irate local resident to release any birds caught. Yet John maintained a huge affinity to the Isles of Scilly throughout his life. Indeed, all of his children with his first wife, Rosemary, were named after islands in the archipelago: Jonathan Martin, Annet(te) and Helen. Much of their early childhood and later holidays were spent on the Scillies.

While out and about they had no trouble locating their father among the vegetation because of the plumes of smoke by day and the glow of a cigarette end by night!

Annette Walker

353. John Parslow in 2012.

John became an information scientist in the Toxic Chemicals and Wildlife section at Monks Wood Experimental Station in 1967. He was a member of a remarkable research team, assembled by Norman Moore and including the likes of Derek Radcliffe, Ian Prestt and others. They highlighted the links between organochlorine pesticides entering the food chain, causing mass deaths of granivorous passerines and the more insidious poisoning and thinning of eggshells in predatory birds. It was at this time that my colleague Richard Porter and I, both recently in post at the RSPB, were invited by John to attend the regular staff seminars at Monks Wood. It was a thrill to be present when some of the research results were reported for the first time, although we had to smile when it was reported that the results of a series of Puffin *Fratercula arctica* deaths in the North Sea were the result of the ingestion of remnants of knicker elastic from a ladies underwear factory on the Rhine!

John served as Director of Conservation and Reserves at the RSPB between 1975 and 1987, reunited with Ian Prestt, who was appointed Director General. John's main passions concerned bird protection and the setting up of key nature reserves. He amassed a team of dedicated officers and created the Species Protection Department. His staff were employed in a wide variety of cases involving breaches of the laws protecting wild birds that ranged from egg-collecting to raptor persecution and catching finches. He was proud that the RSPB struck fear into the miscreants, especially as many of the court cases were taken directly by the RSPB. He contributed much to the RSPB's programme of establishing nature reserves and saw the organisation branch out into acquiring larger, more effective reserves. The present-day populations of important bird species at Abernethy Forest in Speyside, the Nene Washes in Cambridgeshire and Old Hall Marshes in Essex are testimony to his vision and foresight.

Mention must be made of John's passion for cricket, which almost matched his enthusiasm for birds. His father was an outstanding cricketer, who played in many top-level representative matches during and just after the Second World War, and was selected for Essex in 1946. John played many times for the RSPB staff cricket team and is remembered as being a fierce competitor and a more than useful skiddy, medium-pace bowler who bowled naggingly short of a length.

John died on 23rd October 2015. He spent the last years of his life birdwatching and recording at local gravel-pits in Cambridgeshire. He was a lifelong supporter of the BTO and carried on with his WeBS surveys until his final days. He is survived by three children, four grandchildren and four step-grandchildren, and his second wife, Mariko.

Gareth Thomas

Notes

Unusual DNA of a Western Bonelli's Warbler trapped on Shetland

A strikingly dull 'Bonelli's warbler' *Phylloscopus bonelli/orientalis* was found at Sumburgh Head, Shetland, in poor weather on the morning of 14th September 2015 by Peter Stronach, Pete Ellis, Al McNee, George Petrie, Richard Rafe, Bob Swann and Andy Williams. Later that day, as the weather improved, it was trapped by Roger Riddington, Phil Harris and Paul Harvey. In the hand it was aged as a first-year bird on the basis of its completely fresh plumage. Biometrics were taken in the field (table 1), which pointed strongly towards Western Bonelli's Warbler *P. bonelli*: the wing length of 60 mm was 3.5 mm shorter than that of the smallest Eastern Bonelli's *P. orientalis* (Svensson 1992), while the tip of the second primary (P2) fell between the tips of primaries 6/7 and there was a reasonably distinct emargination on P6. However, the body plumage was very drab, with distinctly brownish upperparts, so a feather dislodged during processing was retained for possible DNA analysis. The bird remained at the site and was last seen on 18th September (see pp. 603–605 and plate 329); as far as we know, it was not heard to call during its stay.

Helbig *et al.* (1995) sequenced the mitochondrial cytb gene of Eastern and Western Bonelli's Warblers and showed an impressive level of genetic difference (8.3–8.6%). Eastern and Western Bonelli's Warbler are as distantly related from each other as either is from Wood Warbler *P. sibilatrix*. Hence a genetic analysis of any unidentified bird should be sufficient to confirm the identification. DNA was extracted from the retained feather of the Sumburgh bird and the cytb gene amplified by PCR and sequenced using the same protocols as those outlined in Helbig *et al.* (1995). Some 1030 bp of high-quality sequence was achieved and compared with previous sequences of Western Bonelli's Warbler (from France, Senegal and western Germany) and Eastern Bonelli's Warbler (from Israel, Bulgaria and Turkey). The results were surprising: the cytb sequence of the Sumburgh bird was divergent from both species. It was 7.0–8.5% different from Eastern Bonelli's Warbler sequences and 3.9–4.5% different from previously sequenced Western Bonelli's Warblers. Hence it was closest to Western Bonelli's Warbler and a phylogenetic tree based on the cytb sequence

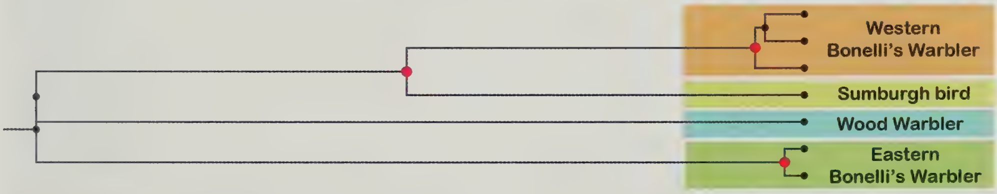

Fig. 1. Phylogenetic tree based on cytb sequence for the Sumburgh Head Bonelli's warbler, compared with previously sequenced Western Bonelli's *Phylloscopus bonelli* and Eastern Bonelli's Warblers *P. orientalis*, and Wood Warbler *P. sibilatrix*. The GenBank Accession numbers of the birds are (from top): Western Bonelli's Warbler, Z73485, Z73486 and AY944179; Wood Warbler, Z73491; Eastern Bonelli's Warbler, AY887678 and Z73490.

Table 1. Western Bonelli's Warbler *Phylloscopus bonelli*, Sumburgh Head, Shetland, September 2015; in-hand measurements.

ringing details	ring number EHX763, age 3
wing	60.0 mm
tail	46.5 mm (distance from tail tip to tip of longest undertail-covert = 18.0 mm)
bill (skull)	13.4 mm
wing formula	P2 = 6/7 wing point = P3/4 emarginated to P6 (less distinct than P3–P5) P1 = -31.5, P2 = -6, P3 = 0, P4 = 0, P5 = -1, P6 = -4, P7 = -8

confirmed that it fell within the Western Bonelli's clade (fig. 1) and must therefore be acceptable as this species. However, the 4% genetic divergence is more than that commonly seen within passerine species, being equivalent, for example, to the difference between Subalpine Warbler *Sylvia cantillans* and Moltoni's Warbler *S. subalpina.* Whether there is in fact currently unrecognised geographic variation, subspecies or even another cryptic species within the Bonelli's warbler complex, it seems certain that the genetic variation has not been fully described, and further work is required. No individuals from Italy have yet been genetically sampled, and given the role of the central Mediterranean region as a glacial refugium, it is tempting to speculate that this is the source of the unusual DNA sequence found in the Sumburgh Head bird.

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J. Martin Collinson, Phil Harris, Paul Harvey, Roger Riddington and Peter Stronach, c/o Institute of Medical Sciences, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen AB25 2ZD; e-mail m.collinson@abdn.ac.uk

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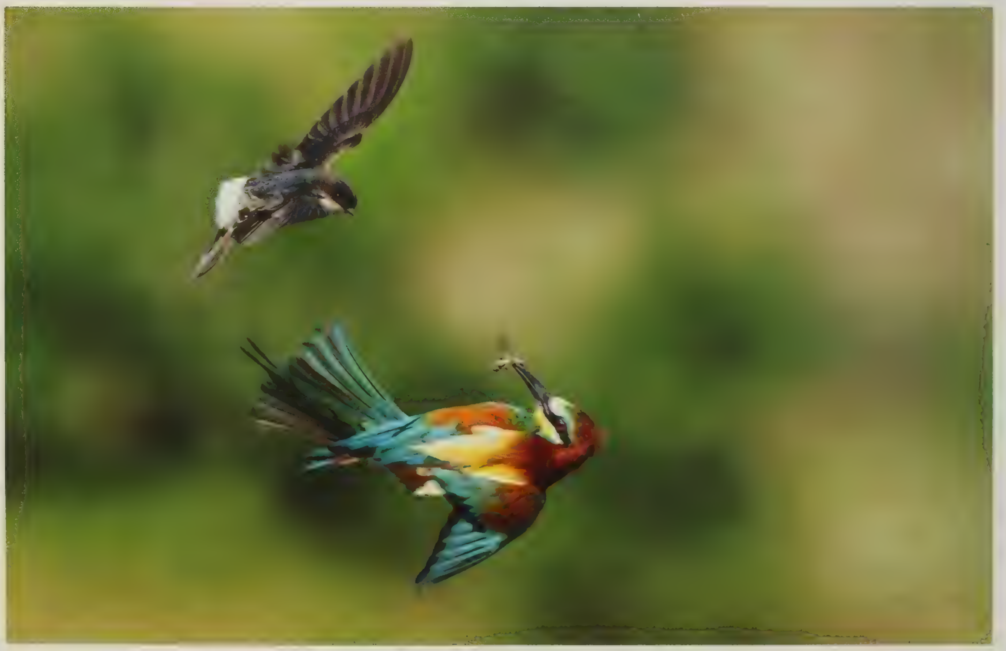
Aggressive encounters between House Martins and European Bee-eaters

During 11th–14th July 2015, I made four visits to a breeding colony of European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster* along a dry river in open countryside some 16 km from the city of Perpignan in southwest France. The nests were located on the riverbank and about 15 birds, including juveniles, could easily be seen hunting bees in the immediate area to a height of about 40 m, regularly perching in a group of tall trees about 20 m from the nests. Also feeding in the area were several House Martins *Delichon urbicum*, although they were generally hunting insects at a higher elevation (up to around 80 m).

On at least five occasions I witnessed the House Martins making aggressive aerial attacks on the bee-eaters. The attacks consisted of a direct swoop towards the intended victim and a very brief squabbling encounter (lasting no



Jean Yves Bartrolich

354. House Martin *Delichon urbicum* and European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster*, southwest France, July 2015.

more than a second) before the hirundine would move away, allowing the bee-eater to continue its flight path unhindered. I was fortunate enough to document this behaviour with several photographs (plate 354).

I have not come across references to such interspecific competition and think that it must be unusual given that both species occupy quite different spheres of the aerial feeding niche.

Jean Yves Bartrolich, 4 Rue A. Maillol, 66300, Thuir, France

Letters

Winter singing in Blackcaps

The Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* is a common winter visitor to much of Britain and Ireland with most birds coming from breeding populations in central Europe (Balmer *et al.* 2013). They are easily overlooked in my local woods in Bangor, Co. Down, until the beginning of March when males begin a frenzy of song for about three weeks. In the fourth week of March they fall silent, as birds begin their return trip to Europe. It is not until the second week in April that local breeders reappear in the woods. The habit of winter singing in Blackcaps is not restricted to birds wintering here but also occurs in our breeding birds, which winter mainly in southern Iberia and northwest Africa; their winter singing lasts from January or early February until mid March, after which birds depart quite suddenly in late March (Pearson 1978). (Pearson stated that some individuals become territorial and establish song-posts; while that observation is correct, the reason may not be territoriality – see below.) So there is a question: why do our wintering birds undergo a three-week period of song before their spring migration?

Recently, Sorensen *et al.* (2016) conducted research into this question for migratory birds on their tropical wintering grounds in Africa. Although they focused particularly on the Great Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus arundinaceus*, they also undertook a comparative study of 57 Palearctic-African migrants. They conducted empirical tests of three competing hypotheses and found no support for the hypotheses that the function of winter song is to defend territory, and that winter song is associated with elevated winter testosterone levels. However, they did find support for the hypothesis that winter song functions to improve breeding songs. They concluded that species that sing most intensely in Africa were those in which sexual selection acts most strongly on song characteristics – species that had more complex songs and were more likely to have drab plumage. While Blackcaps are not drab, they certainly have complex songs and would thus benefit from song practice before heading to their breeding grounds. It seems that Blackcaps wintering in Britain and Ireland could, like their African counterparts, benefit from such behaviour, but testing this idea would be challenging, necessitating following individuals across both wintering and breeding grounds. It would be of interest to determine how widespread is the habit of winter singing of Blackcaps in Britain and Ireland, and when such winter singing is most prevalent.

Acknowledgment

I thank Claire Spottiswoode for critically reading a draft of this letter.

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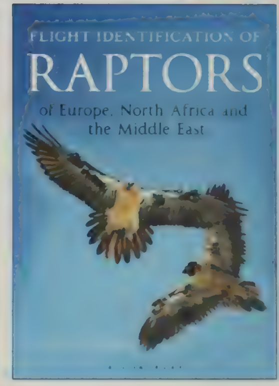
Reviews

Flight Identification of Raptors of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East

Dick Forsman
Christopher Helm, 2016. Hbk, 544pp; many colour photographs
ISBN 978-1-4729-1361-6
RRP £45.00. *BB* **Bookshop price £38.99 if you quote BB095**



Dick Forsman has become a legend in the field of raptor identification. Renowned for his amazing eyesight and an encyclopedic knowledge of identification features, including moult, he has become the 'go to' man if help is needed on photographs of tricky raptors in this digital age.

Dick Forsman has published previously in magazines and a number of books, but confesses that this latest offering has come about because of the advent of modern digital photography. This has truly been a 'game-changer': more images can be taken in rapid succession at high resolution and with amazing autofocus technology, allowing the lens to lock onto a subject at great speed no matter where it may be in the image. High-resolution sensors allow faster shutter speeds, the ability to manipulate (in a positive way) the lighting – notably in shadows when the subject is against a bright sky. As he says: 'Suddenly there was a need to capture all the raptors again with the latest digital equipment. Since 2003, my goal has been to find and to document all the raptor species found within the Western Palearctic, capturing their different plumages for this book.'

And the result is this simply monumental book, which adds greatly to his earlier volume, *The Raptors of Europe and the Middle East* (Poyser, 1999). Naturally, comparisons will be made between the two, but in reality they complement each other: the earlier book contains more substantive and detailed text, a few illustrations as well as many photographs – of birds perched and in flight though of variable quality; the later volume has less text, but vastly improved images of raptors in flight – all superb and reproduced larger; and of course these photos are underpinned by another 15–20 years of experience and knowledge.

The introductory text covers issues such as plumage variation and moult, but also two sections by other authors that particularly caught my eye: 'Hawkwatching in and around Europe', by Keith L. Bildstein and Anna Sandor; and 'Migration Ecology', by Ian Newton, which looks at mode of flight, how weather affects migration and the new(ish) science of satellite tracking that is increasing our knowledge of raptor migration immensely. These are but the hors d'ouevres before the main course, however; the bulk of the book (nearly 500 pages) is a wealth of very high-quality flight photographs, almost all taken within the designated area of the title of the book, and virtually all taken by the author.

Taxonomically, the order of the species roughly follows that established by *Raptors of Europe and the Middle East*, but was a little alien to me, as a user of the IOC Checklist. There is no mention of the recent placement of falcons near to parrots in the systematic order, and it would be fascinating to know Forsman's thoughts about that. Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* and Barbary Falcon *F. pelegrinoides* are treated as one species, though it is noted that 'the entire Peregrine complex is still in need of further taxonomic research'. In the course of the 33 images of the two it may be hard to argue against the logic of such a decision, given the variability and extensive 'hybridisation' between them. In general, though, a little more discussion of the reasons for the decisions made on taxonomy and nomenclature might have been helpful in promoting our understanding.

There is an increase of 18 species from the first book, mostly a result of the wider geographic scope, but sometimes taxonomic revision, as in the case of Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius*, and recent occurrences within the Western Palearctic – Amur Falcon *F. amurensis* and African White-backed Vulture *Gyps africanus*. Also new is the discussion of certain hybrids or intergrades that affect positive identification of some extralimital species. A good example is the expanded Black Kite *Milvus migrans* account. Over 18 pages and 42 clear annotated photos, we are taken through ageing and

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identification features of 'Western Black Kite' *M. m. migrans* and 'Black-eared Kite' *M. m. lineatus*, highlighting the problems that may be encountered in identifying and assessing putative claims outside the normal range, especially of some *lineatus*-like intergrades, termed 'Eastern Black Kite'.

Account length varies according to the level of complexity of the topic: there are two pages and three photographs on Swallow-tailed Kite *Elanoides forficatus* – included on the basis of two records from Iceland – and some 30 photos of Common Buzzard *Buteo b. buteo* plus 36 of Steppe Buzzard *B. b. vulpinus*, 23 of Long-legged Buzzard *B. r. rufinus* and 20 of 'Atlas' Long-legged Buzzard *B. r. cirtensis* and 'Gibraltar Buzzard' intermediates. The text of each species follows a standard format of 'Variation' (actually largely taxonomy), 'Distribution', 'Behaviour', 'Species Identification' and 'Plumages' (both highly variable in length depending on the difficulty of the subject), 'Moult' and 'Confusion Risks'.

For all species it is the photographs, plus Forsman's brief but focused captions, that will inspire and educate the most. The reproduction is very good and photographic quality veers between very good to excellent. The images are printed larger than in the previous book, allowing for closer examination of the details described. Sometimes they are almost too good, showing a level of detail that may not actually be visible in the field: species such as (European) Honey-buzzard *Pernis apivorus* and Peregrine are often identified before much plumage detail is noted, but Forsman deals with both the simple identification (shape and structure) and the greater detail required for ageing, sexing and separation of difficult and similar species. I suspect that this is a book aimed at those who want to take their raptor identification skills to another level.

This is an outstanding book and I know that it will take the place of my well-worn 'first Forsman' as the first port of call for all of my raptor ID concerns – of which there can be many at times… The sections on '*pyg-mac*' harriers – Montagu's *Circus pygmaeus* and Pallid Harrier *C. macrourus* – may well be the ones I consult the most. I have few quibbles, but there is no mention of eastern Lesser Kestrels *F. naumanni*, sometimes treated as a separate subspecies '*pekinensis*', or the increase in grey on the wings and general darker overall appearance of eastern birds; some of the 'Behaviour' sections are a bit 'dry', giving little away of the excitement of watching raptors or the dynamic nature of some of the species – Merlin *F. columbarius* for example; and the taxonomic issues mentioned earlier. Yet these are not really negatives, and perhaps I just wanted even more from the maestro himself!

This book is the result of Dick Forsman spending a lifetime watching raptors. You feel that there is little he doesn't know. Even if you already own the 'first Forsman' – or any other book on the flight identification of Western Palearctic raptors – you should not hesitate to buy this one too!

Brian Small

Britain's Birds: an identification guide to the birds of Britain and Ireland

By Rob Hume, Robert Still, Andy Swash, Hugh Harrop and David Tipling

WildGuides, 2016. Pbk, 560pp; over 3,200 colour photographs
ISBN 978-0-691-15889-1
RRP £19.95. *BB* **Bookshop price £13.95 if you quote BB106**

BRITAIN'S BIRDS
An identification guide to the birds of Britain and Ireland
Rob Hume, Robert Still, Andy Swash, Hugh Harrop and David Tipling
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giving nature a home

This volume covers all of the species, and more distinctive subspecies, recorded in Britain and Ireland, including all accepted vagrants plus a few very recently reported species that have not, as yet, been verified by the relevant national bodies. In so far as any published work can be up to date, the present book scores very highly. Although Ireland is mentioned in the subheading, the main title seems curious, and not a little undiplomatic, given the actual geographical scope. Surely a more appropriate, if less snappy, title could have been chosen.

In addition to its more limited geographical scope, compared with most of the alternative identification guides on the market, what really sets the present book apart is that it uses photographs rather than illustrations. I have always been rather wary of photographic guides, since the best illustrators (and we are truly spoiled for these in Europe) can capture the essence of a species, whereas photographs simply show individual birds at a moment in time. Yet this guide goes a long way to convince me that photographic identification guides do indeed have

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a role to play, at least as useful companion volumes to conventional guides.

The standard of the photographs – and there are over 3,200, although some are used more than once – is generally outstanding and their arrangement carefully and effectively thought through to maximise their usefulness as identification aids. More difficult species and groups have more images and in some cases there are separate pages in which similar species are compared side by side and the identification issues discussed. Small maps indicate distribution within the covered area but text is minimal, briefly summarising status and key characteristics. Most of the photographs are annotated with age and sex details or to further highlight useful field marks.

In the case of more difficult species groups, such minimal text is sometimes a disadvantage and important caveats are not always addressed. For example, a pale flash on the under primary coverts is a useful, but not diagnostic, field mark of young Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus* and is referred to twice on the page comparing juvenile skuas. One of the images of a juvenile Arctic Skua *S. parasiticus* on the same page, though, shows exactly the same feature, yet this receives no clarifying comment.

Of greater concern, however, is the fact that some photographs have either been misidentified or show misleadingly atypical individuals. The bird labelled as a juvenile Audouin's Gull *Larus audouinii* on p. 139 looks much more like one of the other large gulls due to the heavy checkering on the wing-coverts; a better example of a clear-cut Audouin's could easily have been found. In a book of this size and ambition it is inevitable that some errors will creep in but it is hard to explain away the fact that the juvenile Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* on p. 182, complete with annotations pinpointing features separating it from a Ringed Plover *C. hiaticula*, is surely itself a Ringed Plover. Such mistakes are not widespread, though I believe others have found more than I have detected so far, and there are enough to be a cause of concern.

More prevalent are issues around the labels describing the age and sex of birds in the images. These are used liberally but in more than just a few instances they are incorrect or at least questionable. The bird labelled as a first-summer Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* in August on p. 144 could in reality be of any age except juvenile. On p. 355 two spring Meadow Pipits *Anthus pratensis* are confidently aged as '1st-year' – how has this been done? I'm not at all sure that it can be. Less would have been more here, while it is admirable to try and put an age or sex on everything, there must be limits dictated by what can actually be known with certainty. It is frustrating too that when images are reused on pages where species are compared side by side they are sometimes labelled differently, thus the 'juvenile' Goshawk *Accipiter gentilis* on p. 315 is an 'immature male' two pages before; and there are many examples of such niggling discrepancies. Again and again I'm left asking how, and indeed why, a particular bird has been aged and sexed as it has.

Such errors and suggestions of carelessness tend to put you on guard for other inaccuracies, which in turn limits your faith in the book as an identification guide. On the back cover is the claim that *Britain's Birds* offers 'Simple steps to help you find and identify any bird you see'. This is an extravagant claim for any guide, though presumably down to the publisher rather than the authors, who rightly caution against overly simplistic identification processes in the introduction. Unfortunately, they do not always seem to have followed their own advice. It is also stated that the guide will 'show all plumages likely to be encountered'. This claim is also rather wide of the mark; for example, anyone looking for an image of a juvenile Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* will be disappointed, unless they realise that some of the birds labelled as adult females appear to be juveniles. In comparison with what must have been a monumental task of gathering and arranging the images, I'm left with the impression that less care and attention was taken when preparing the accompanying text and captions.

Just 20 years ago, *Britain's Birds* would have represented an undreamed of resource for those interested in the finer points of bird identification. Younger readers will hardly be able to believe how difficult it was to get access to photographs for reference in the pre-digital age. Now, of course, a few clicks of a mouse will give you access to a multitude of photographs of almost any species on the planet. Despite occasional errors, the present guide is still far more reliable than such online resources – the internet is a veritable hotbed of bird misidentification.

This guide is a genuine bargain and the photographs are truly excellent in the main, as is the way they have been presented. Despite some concerns and frustrations, I cannot help but recommend it to anyone with an interest in the status and identification of birds in Britain and, of course, Ireland. Some may feel, though, that it would be better to wait for a revised version in which some of the unfortunate errors have been fixed.

Chris Kehoe

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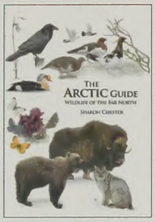

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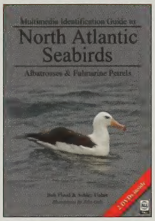

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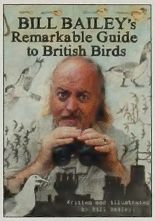

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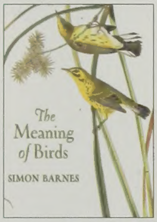

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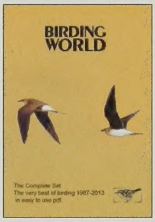

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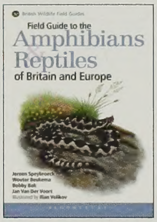

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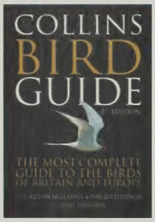

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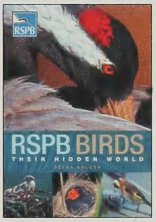

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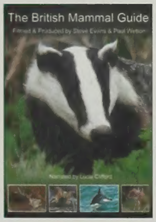

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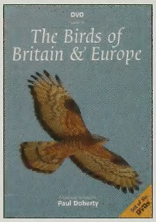

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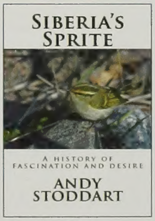

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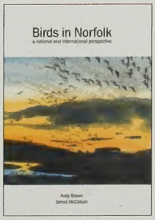

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